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WITH THAT OF

SOME OTHER SCRIPTURES,

DEEMED CANONICAL.

BY

EDWARD EVANSON, A. M.

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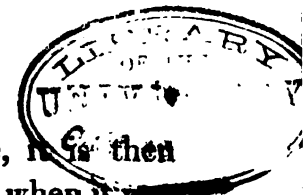
PREFACE.

IN both the general spirit and particular precepts of the religion of Jesus Christ, there is something so amiable, so obviously conducing to the diminution of misery, and the diffusion of comfort and happiness amongst mankind, that, it may reasonably be presumed, no man duly acquainted with that beautiful, that perfect system of morality, can be so unfeeling for the concerns of his fellow-creatures, and so little a real friend to himself, as not to wish the truth of the Gospel Revelation could be so satisfactorily demonstrated, as to convince the minds of men of all degrees and stations, and induce them, not merely to profess to receive it, for that alone can answer no desirable purpose, but conscientiously to make it the rule of their lives and conduct at all times, and on all occasions, both in public and in private. To accomplish this, it is, in the first place, absolutely necessary, that its celestial origin and authenticity should be fully and clearly ascertained, and no just

cause left for doubt and uncertainty about it; for the least room for doubting in such a case, throws so considerable a weight into the scale of immediate self-interest, and our natural appetites and infirmities, as renders it next to impossible that its precepts should have any valuable efficacy upon him who doubts; notwithstanding all the prudential suggestions of modern preachers, that *he who walketh religiously, walketh surely;* and that the truest wisdom is to act upon the *supposition* of the truth of the Christian Revelation. Men sometimes act upon uncertain, dubious prospects, in the trifling concerns of the present life; but the views of futurity, opened to us by revelation, are too vast, too important for the calculation of chances, or the principles of commercial speculation: if they are not indisputably certain, they are nothing.

The Apostles and primitive Christians acted under a full conviction of the infallible certainty of the doctrines which they believed and taught. And if satisfactory proofs of the truth and divine authority of the Gospel, and a complete knowledge and understanding of its intent and doctrines, be really attainable to the ordinary faculties of the human mind, and easy to be comprehended by children and



the most illiterate of the people, it is then like what it was represented to be when it was first preached to the unlearned and the poor; worthy of the impartial benevolence of the common father of the human race; and fit to be an universal rule of life, and source of religious information, to every rational individual of all the nations of the earth. If, on the contrary, its own truth, and the authenticity of the scriptures which teach it, rest solely upon the plurality of the voices of corrupt and erring men, of no authority from heaven, and supported only by the power of earthly magistrates; if its most important, because its fundamental, doctrines are to be interpreted only by the critical sagacity of the learned, respecting the meaning of a few controverted words or sentences of Greek or Hebrew, it is then involved in endless doubt and uncertainty; is totally unlike the Gospel preached originally by Jesus and his Apostles; absolutely useless, because unintelligible, to the great bulk of mankind; and, in every way, unbecoming that eternal fountain of wisdom and intelligence from which it is said to be derived.

Under this dilemma, thinking the certainty of either the truth or falsehood of a revelation

of the will of God to be of the highest importance, the Author of the following disquisition, at once to satisfy his own mind, and to qualify himself for a faithful and beneficial performance of the duties of the Christian ministry, for which he had been educated, many years ago determined to study the scriptures diligently, with no other illustration than what they reflect upon each other; and more especially those prophetic parts of them which, if duly fulfilled, must afford the strongest and most convincing evidence of the divine authority of the revelation itself; and almost necessarily lead to a right understanding of the nature of that religious Covenant to which they bear a supernatural attestation. He had remarked, indeed, that amongst its professional teachers all the ablest advocates for the truth and divine authority of the Gospel, as if they knew of no certain, demonstrative proof which could be adduced in a case of so much importance, seemed to content themselves, and expect their readers should be satisfied, with an accumulation of probable arguments in its favour. And the Author has even been told, that the case admits of no other kind of proof. He is happy, however, to have learned, from the only in-

fallible authority, the direct contrary. And he begs all professed Christians of that persuasion to consider, whether it could be reconciled to any just ideas of wisdom in an earthly Potentate, if he should send an ambassador to a foreign state to mediate a negociation of the greatest importance, without furnishing him with certain indubitable credentials of the truth and authenticity of his mission. And to consider further, whether it be just or seemly to attribute to the omniscient, omnipotent Deity, a degree of weakness and folly which was never yet imputed to any of his human creatures: for unless men are impious and hardy enough to pass so gross an affront upon the tremendous Majesty of Heaven, the improbability that God should delegate the Mediator of a most important Covenant to be proposed to all mankind, without enabling him to give them clear and indisputable proof of the divine authority of his mission, must ever infinitely outweigh the aggregate sum of all the probabilities which can be accumulated in the opposite scale of the balance. So that to all those who know of no other proof of the divine authority of the Gospel, no rational proof of it exists. Mere human testimony, whether re-

corded in written history, or deduced to us by oral tradition, is manifestly incompetent to afford satisfaction to any unprejudiced mind respecting communications of a supernatural kind. And with regard to miracles, under the Old Covenant, God himself, by his prophet Moses, cautioned the Jews against receiving the religious doctrines of any pretended prophet, though he should even work miracles to convince them, because they would be liable to be deluded and deceived by such evidence:* and under the New Covenant he has warned us, by his prophet Jesus, in the persons of his Apostles Paul and John, that the false and fabulous superstition, which would for so many centuries supplant the true religion of the Gospel, would be embraced by the people, in consequence of their delusion by "*signs and lying wonders,*† *and all the* "*deceivableness of unrighteousness.*" This being the case with miracles considered in themselves alone, God, by his prophets both of the Old Covenant and the New, hath given us another, an infallible criterion by which to distinguish the true from a false religion, and, as I have shewn in the following pages, refer

* Deut xiii. 1—5.

† Thess. ii. 9, 10. Apoc. xiii. 13, 14, and xix. 20.

us solely to the testimony of completed prophecy, which he would not have done, if any other had been necessary, or to be depended upon with equal certainty and satisfaction of mind.

In religion, as in every other science founded in truth, if we recur to its first principles, we shall find them self-evident propositions, by means of which the truth of all its doctrines may be clearly and satisfactorily demonstrated. For instance, that the whole is greater than any of its parts, is not a more unquestionable truth than the proposition, that no effect can exist without some adequate producing cause. And on this axiom is founded, that certain, satisfactory demonstration, which the visible structure of the universe, and all it contains, affords us of the being of a God. From the very same axiom—if predictions of any men exist, respecting events that were not to take place till many ages after the deaths of those men themselves; which predictions are known to have been promulged to the world several centuries before their completion, and which history and our own experience inform us have been punctually accomplished—a sure demonstrative proof arises, that the prophets could have received their information only

through a revelation, communicated to them by the Deity, of his will and decrees concerning the events of futurity; for such prophecies are effects which no other cause is competent to produce.

In the course of an investigation formed upon this plan, and pursued upon these grounds, the Author soon found himself convinced of the truth of Christianity, as taught by its first preachers; but was led also to remark many obvious inconsistencies and improbabilities in several of the canonical scriptures of the New Covenant, which he could not account for, on a supposition that the authors were men of that veracity and information of their subject, which must be expected from the Apostles and other miraculously gifted disciples of Jesus Christ. He therefore resolved to examine thoroughly into the nature of those proofs of the genuine authenticity of the books of the New Testament, which, till then, he had taken for granted, and supposed to be uncontrovertibly demonstrated; and was astonished to find, upon what slight and unsatisfactory grounds scriptures of the greatest consequence have been universally received by professed Christians, as the infallible word of God. From his studious

attention to the prophetic parts of those scriptures, which alone carry certain evidence of their own divine authority along with them; he could not fail also to observe, that the chief and almost only argument in favour of the present canon of scripture, which does not rest upon mere human authority of the most suspicious kind, is manifestly fallacious; he means the argument which urges, that both the wisdom and goodness of God required the interposition of his povidence, to preserve pure and uncorrupt the genuine authentic records of that Gospel which he had thought fit, at the expence of so many miracles and prophecies, to publish to the world.—For having, by his prophet Paul, declared that Christians, of times succeeding the apostolic age, would apostatize from the original faith and doctrines of the Gospel; that some with *hardened hypocrisy* would publish *lies*;* and that professed Christians in general, would *turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables*;† the veracity of the God of truth plainly demanded, that lying fictions and fabulous scriptures should, at least, be joined with the true and genuine records of the religion of the New Covenant, or it would

* 1 Tim. iv. 2. † 2 Tim. iv. 4.

have been impossible for the apostate Church to fulfil those prophecies, by disregarding the latter and paying devout attention to the former. That many therefore of those scriptures, which form the most essential part of the canon of the apostate Church, must be fabulous and false, seems as certain, as that the word of God is true.

Strongly impressed with this apparently inevitable consequence from those prophecies, and dissatisfied with all the external evidence which the case admits, he turned his attention more particularly to those internal marks of authenticity or spuriousness, which genuine or fictitious scriptures must always necessarily contain. And that attentive examination brought him to the conclusions which he here submits to public consideration. He does this the more cheerfully, because the subjects of discussion, like the Gospel of Christ itself, are level to common capacities, and intelligible to every person who will exert his rational faculties about them: for where the detection of forgery and falsehood depends upon gross and palpable inconsistencies and contradictions, it is not peculiarly the province of that critical skill which requires a knowledge of the original language of the

scriptures attainable to few; but, when those contradictions are pointed out, becomes the proper business of the common sense of every reader of even the vulgar translations. He is fully persuaded, that nothing can so effectually amend and bless mankind, as a general, rational comprehension and well-grounded belief of the Gospel Covenant; and that nothing can so much promote the cause of Christian truth and piety, as the distinguishing them from fabulous falsehood and impious superstition. Unconnected for near thirty years with any religious sect or party whatsoever, disapproving in every point of view of the office of a teacher of so plain a thing as Christianity, considered as a lucrative occupation, and much too far advanced in life to have any temporal interest in view, the Author trusts his mind has been perfectly unbiassed and impartial in its investigations. But if he should have deceived himself, and be judged by others to be in the wrong, still his errors, if found to be such, may most easily be exposed and refuted; and no one will be better pleased than himself with their just and candid refutation. Should this, however, be attempted, he hopes it will be effected in a more manly, rational manner,

than was adopted by the only two gentlemen who thought proper to make any public attack upon the first edition, by clearly reconciling the several objectionable passages, as the scriptures really exist, without recurring either to any human authority, or to a fanciful transposition of paragraphs, or to hypothetical systems unwarranted by the Gospels themselves; for, by such means, a man of a fertile imagination may possibly frame an *ideal* history of Jesus, which may comprehend the most incongruous circumstances, as geometricians can contrive to draw a circle of some diameter or other through any three points which lie not in a right line; but, if such modes of interpreting scripture may be allowed, the most ingenious novel-writer will make the ablest commentator; and in removing the difficulties of the evangelical histories, will far surpass the efforts of the most learned doctors of Christendom.

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THE

DISSONANCE AND EVIDENCE

OF

THE EVANGELISTS

EXAMINED.

INTRODUCTION.

SECTION I.

AFTER so many writers, some of them of great erudition and distinguished abilities, in almost all ages of what is called the Christian Church, have undertaken to harmonize and shew the perfect agreement of the four generally received Evangelists, and to reconcile all the seeming differences in both the facts and order of their several narrations; it will undoubtedly appear the highest degree of presumptuous arrogance to attempt now at last to demonstrate, that so much learned and ingenious labour hath been bestowed in vain. Yet after all that hath been said and written upon the subject, those Evangelical histories contain such gross, irreconcileable contradic-

tions, that no close reasoning, unprejudiced mind can admit the truth and authenticity of them all.

It is an obvious axiom, that, in the investigation of the doctrines of Christianity, the first necessary step is to inquire into the truth and authenticity of those original writings in which they are contained: but the misfortune is, that nobody takes this important, necessary step of the inquiry, in any firm and satisfactory manner. If we examine, for instance, upon what grounds professed Christians of the present age are convinced, that the four Gospels (as they are usually called) were really written by the men whose names they bear, we are referred to the concurring testimony of all the ecclesiastical historians and divines from the age of Constantine to our own; and to the consent of even the most formidable adversaries of the Church, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, who all allowed the Gospels to be written by those Apostles and their disciples, to whom they are universally attributed. But, it must be observed by the way, that the consent of those early adversaries of Christianity, is very far from being, in any degree, a proof of the point in question. They were all much too great masters of argument not

to see how greatly that very concession was in their favour. And were not the author of these pages convinced, as he really is, upon better and firmer grounds, of the truth and divine authority of the revelation by Jesus Christ; and had he an inclination to prejudice the gospel in the opinion of thinking men; he cannot imagine a stronger argument than might be drawn against it, from the objectionable, contradictory passages contained in those books, on a supposition that they were all actually written by its first and most authoritative teachers: but he has no object in view, in this publication, besides the investigation of truth, and the promotion of moral virtue and human happiness, by endeavouring to demonstrate the sure and certain grounds upon which the genuine religion of Christ is founded; which, he is persuaded, can only be effected by clearing the pure and simple seed of the divine word, not from any chaff, from any native incumbrances of its own, for it has none, but from the gross, fictitious varnish and filthy rubbish with which idolatrous superstition hath so long clogged and overwhelmed it, that not only its natural beneficial powers of vegetation remain suspended; but it is even become exceedingly difficult for mankind to

discern what it is. For this purpose, after the mature deliberation of a greater number of years than the Roman Poet thought fit to prescribe for publications of a less important kind, the author presumes to trace the abuses and corruptions of Christianity to their source; and to distinguish the truth of revealed religion from the fables of credulous superstition, in those very scriptures which have been hitherto regarded as being all of equal authority and credibility, and as containing, in common, the fundamental truths and essential doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we consult that succession of ecclesiastical writers, to which we are referred, from the establishment of the Church by Constantine, we find they received the four Gospels, which they have transmitted to us, upon the authority of those professed Christians of the second and third centuries, whom they have thought fit to denominate *orthodox*; and who, rejecting all those numerous Evangelical histories which Luke informs us were written in his time, admitted and preserved these four alone, and attributed them to the authors under whose names they now appear.

This, it is apprehended, is a true, impartial state of the historical evidence, that Matthew and John the apostles, and Mark and Luke disciples of the apostolic age, were the writers of the several histories which bear their name. But this evidence, satisfactory as it hath been thought to be, is really attended with such suspicious circumstances as make it liable to much reasonable distrust; for either the orthodox religion established by the Emperor Constantine, is a blasphemous, idolatrous superstition, an apostasy from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which it has supplanted, and, of course, the Fathers of that Church of the preceding centuries, were by no means fit judges of the genuine Evangelical writings; or else the Gospel itself cannot be admitted to be true. For thus stands the case.

II. A DIVINE Revelation, being a supernatural interposition of the Deity in human affairs, cannot, by any prudent person, be acknowledged as such upon common and merely natural evidence of any sort whatever. To gain it admission and belief at first, it must ever be attested by a display of miracu-

lous supernatural power, as in the case of Moses and the prophets under the Jewish Law, and of Jesus and his apostles under the Gospel; and to all future ages, prophecy, the completed prediction of events out of the power of human sagacity to foresee, is the only supernatural testimony that can be alleged in proof of the authenticity of any Revelation. To those, for example, of the present age, who have any doubt about the certainty of the Christian Revelation, and consequently of the truth and authenticity of those histories in which it is recorded, it cannot be of the least use to allege the miraculous acts there, and there only, related to have been performed by the first preachers of that Revelation; because those acts making a very considerable part of the narration, the authority and credibility of the histories must be firmly established, before the miracles contained in them can reasonably be admitted as real facts. But with prophecy the case is widely different. The testimony it adduces depends not in the least upon the veracity or credibility of the writer, but every man capable of understanding the meaning of the prediction, and of comparing it with the cor-

responding events whereby it hath been or is compleated, is a competent judge of the degree of proof it affords.

Prophecy, therefore, is by far the most satisfactory, and the only lasting, supernatural evidence of the truth of any Revelation. To this the Jewish, to this the Christian Revelation both appeal, as the great criterion of their divine origin and authority. In the old Testament, God, by his prophet Isaiah,* declares this to be the proper distinguishing mark between false religions and the true. "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring "forth your strong reasons, saith the King of "Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and "shew us *what shall happen*; let them shew "the former things what they be, that we "may consider them, and know the latter end "of them; or *declare us things for to come*, "*shew the things that are to come hereafter*, "*that we may know that ye are gods.*" And again,† "Thus saith the Lord,—I am the "first and I am the last, and besides me there "is no God. And who, as I, shall call and "shall declare it, and set it in order for me, "since I appointed the ancient People? And "*the things that are coming and shall come, let*

* Is. xli. 21, &c. † Is. xliii. 6, &c.

"*them shew unto them*," with many other passages of the like import. In Deuteronomy,* prophecy is particularly referred to as the only satisfactory proof of the divine mission of the mediator of the new covenant, who is there expressly promised to the Jewish nation. "If "thou say in thine heart, how shall we know "the word which the Lord hath not spoken? "when a prophet speaketh in the name of "the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come "to pass, that is the thing which the Lord "hath not spoken, but the prophet hath "spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not "be afraid of him." And in the New Testament, in conformity to this criterion given us by Moses, we are assured upon the highest authority,† that "the testimony of Jesus is "the spirit of prophecy." We are necessarily reduced to this alternative, either to admit that, therefore, those predictions contained in the New Testament, which relate to the present time and to times already past, have been fulfilled, or that the Gospel itself is an imposture and of no authority at all.

Now the obvious purport of almost all the prophecies of the Gospel, as they are dispersed in different scriptures of the New Tes-

* Deut. xviii. 21 and 22. † Apoc. xix. 10.

tament, is to predict the circumstances of a most unhappy corruption of the genuine religion of Jesus, which began to operate even in the days of the apostles themselves, and was to end in an entire apostasy from the truths of the Gospel, and the establishment of a false, fabulous, irrational, idolatrous, blasphemous superstition, first by the civil power of the Roman Empire, under some signal change in its circumstances, and afterwards by the civil power of all those separate western kingdoms, into which that Empire, at its dissolution, was to be divided. And the same prophecies assure us, that the true religion of Christ would be no where generally received, till after the same civil powers which established it, shall have abolished and destroyed the Antichristian Church thus predicted. Unless therefore the testimony of these prophecies fail us entirely, and the Gospel itself be false, the orthodox Church established by Constantine, which is now and has been ever since his time, in some modification of it or other, the only religion established by the civil powers of Europe, is the very object of these prophecies, the completion of the predicted apostasy; for no other is to be found.*

* If there be, let the zealous advocates of the doctrines of that Church, and her canonical scriptures, point it out to us; or if that be

III. For this reason, to an impartial investigator of the truth of Christianity, the mere testimony of any writer whom the long established European Church hath denominated *orthodox*, is so far from affording satisfactory proof of the authenticity of the several books of the New Testament, that, unless it be confirmed by evidence of another kind, it even affords, not merely strong grounds of suspicion, but absolute proof, that they are not, either in the whole, or, at least, in some parts, the works of the apostles or primitive disciples of Jesus Christ: because part of the prophetic description of the antichristian Church is, that its members should* *turn away their ears from the truth*, and listen to *fables*, and believe *falsehoods*; circumstances of the prediction which, taken together, cannot have been fulfilled, unless fables and falsehoods are, at least, intermixed with *disregarded* truth, in those writings to which the Church of Constantine hath, in all ages, appealed as containing the grounds and foundation of every doctrine she hath taught. What renders this still more probable is, that before the invention of printing it was very easy for

not in their power, let them honestly and candidly yield to the force of arguments founded upon the infallible word of the God of truth.

* 2 Tim. iv. 4, and 1 Tim. iv. 1, &c.

artful or superstitious copyists, not only to interpolate authentic writings with such alterations and additions as accorded with their own credulity or cunning, but even to produce entire pieces of their own or others' forgery under the name of any writer they pleased. And this practice was actually so common amongst several who called themselves Christians, in the second and succeeding centuries, that if what we call the scriptures of the New Testament were not so tampered with, they are almost the only writings upon the same subject of those early times, which have escaped free.

Archbishop Wake took the pains to collect all the writings extant, except those that have been received into the canon of the church, which are attributed to any christian writer, within the first half of the second century; and every competent, impartial judge must agree with the truly learned and candid Professor Mosheim, that, of the whole collection, there is no satisfactory proof that any one piece worth notice, is really the work of the writer whose name it bears, except the first Epistle of Clemens the Roman: and even that hath been evidently corrupted by

an interpolation of the absurd Pagan fable of the Phœnix. Irenæus informs us* that the different sectarists of those early ages, had published an innumerable multitude of apocryphal and spurious scriptures to astonish the weak and ignorant. And Tertullian† mentions that an Asiatic priest had been detected in ascribing to Paul a work entirely his own. And that the writings of Luke, on many accounts by far the most respectable historian in the canonical collection, did not escape untouched by the hands of the interpolators, even after the second century, we have the clearest conviction; for Origen tells us that several believers in his time were offended with that part of Luke's Gospel, wherein our Lord promises the penitent thief upon the cross that he should *that day* be with him *in Paradise*, as being absolutely inconsistent with the history of our Lord's own circumstances and situation from his death to his resurrection; and declared, that passage was not in the older copies, but a late addition of some of the interpolators.‡ And though Origen himself does not agree with them, yet

* Lib. I. c. xvii. † De Bap. sec. xvii.

‡ Παδιουργου. See his Comm. on John.

they were assuredly in the right; for neither Justin, nor Irenæus, nor Tertullian, take the least notice of so very remarkable a circumstance, though they have quoted almost every other passage of Luke relating to the crucifixion; and though Tertullian in particular has written a treatise upon the soul, in which he expressly considers the different opinions concerning the intermediate state of the souls of good and bad men between their death and resurrection, repeatedly quotes the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, from which, as being only a parable constructed upon the popular notions of the Jews, no satisfactory argument can be deduced: whereas that single passage of Luke's history, had it existed in his time, must have settled the point beyond all dispute: and consequently it could not have been omitted by him when writing on such a subject. It is clear therefore that as the doctrine of an intermediate state of Purgatory and Paradise gained ground in the orthodox church after the second century, that particular passage was interpolated to give the sanction of holy scripture to the newly received doctrine; as Sir Isaac Newton has proved to the conviction

of every unprejudiced* mind, the famous seventh verse of John's first Epistle was inserted some ages later, to countenance another long controverted doctrine of the same Church, the Trinity in Unity.

IV. The whole weight of the historical evidence in favour of the authenticity of the four Gospels, amounts to no more than this, that those books, in the main of their contents, were extant in the latter end of the second century, and were received by all the Christian writers, whose works have been suffered to come down to us, as the writings of the several apostles and apostolic men whose names they bear. But besides the suspicious circumstance already mentioned, arising from the prophecies of the Gospel, this evidence is defective in such essential points as render it wholly unsatisfactory and insufficient to prove any matter of consequence, even in the ordinary courts of justice: for neither the competency nor veracity of the witnesses can be depended on.

* Even the prejudiced and uncandid must surely, *now*, be silenced, at least, by the learned and ingenious letters of Mr. Porson to Archdeacon Travis.

To convince me, for instance, that histories recording such very extraordinary, useless, ill-supported, improbable facts as are contained in the Gospels of Matthew and John, are really the works of those apostles, and not either some of the many spurious productions with which, we learn from Irenæus, that early age abounded, calculated to astonish the credulous and superstitious, or else writings of authors, of the same age, who were themselves infected with the grossest superstitious credulity; of what use can it be to adduce the testimony of the very few writers of the same or the next succeeding age, when the very reading their works shews me that they themselves were tainted with that same superstitious credulity of which I suspect the real authors of the histories in question? When one* of them illustrates and pleads for the toleration of the orthodox doctrine of the generation of the Word by the heathen Emperors, because of its resemblance to the fabulous origin of their own Deities Mercury and Minerva; and justifies the doctrine of the *incarnation* by its similarity to the births of Esculapius and Hercules, and the other illustrious *God-men* of pagan mytholo-

* Justin Martyr, Apol. 1.

gy; and accounts for this similarity between the orthodox doctrines and the fables of the Poets, by asserting that the Poets delivered them through the inspiration of Demons and evil geniuses, in order to prejudice the world against the reception of those orthodox tenets, when the time should come for their promulgation. When another,* describing the Millennium, gravely assures me, upon the authority of the apostle John himself, not only that every productive part of the vine from the stem to the bunch, and of wheat from the root to the ear, shall be multiplied by ten thousand, every bunch containing ten thousand grapes, and every ear ten thousand grains, but that *every grain of wheat shall yield ten pounds of pure fine flour, and every grape four hogsheads of wine*, and that *when any of the Saints shall be going to gather one of these bunches, another will cry out, I am a better bunch, take me and bless God by me.* When a third† asserts, upon his own knowledge, that the corpse of one dead Christian, *at the first breath of the prayer made by the Priest*, on occasion of its own funeral, *removed its hands from its sides, into the usual posture of a supplicant*, and, *when the service was ended, restored*

* Irenæus Lib. v. c. xxxiii. † Tertullian, De An. c. li.

them again to their former situation; and relates as a fact, which he and all the orthodox of his time credited, that the body of another Christian already interred *moved itself to one side of the grave, to make room for another corpse, which was going to be laid by it.* It is an obvious rule in the admission of evidence in any cause whatsoever, that the more important the matter to be determined by it is, the more unsullied and unexceptionable ought the characters of the witnesses to be. And when no court of justice, in determining a question of fraud to the amount of a few pounds, will admit the testimony of witnesses who are themselves notoriously convicted of the same crime of which the defendant is accused; how can it be expected, that any reasonable, unprejudiced person should admit similar evidence to be of weight, in a case of the greatest importance possible, not to himself only, but to the whole human race?

V. But there is still a greater defect in the testimony of those early writers, than even their superstitious credulity. I mean their disregard of honour and veracity in what-

ever concerned the cause of their particular system.

Though Luke assures us, that many, even before he wrote his histories for the use of his friend Theophilus, had written upon the same subject, who of course were chiefly converts from amongst the Jews; and many more must have written afterwards, some of them, without doubt, like Timothy, educated from their infancy in the religion of Jesus Christ, as taught by the Apostles themselves, whose writings, on that very account, would have been particularly valuable: so singularly industrious have the Fathers and succeeding Sons of the orthodox Church been in destroying every writing upon the subject of Christianity, which they could not by some means or other apply to the support of their own blasphemous superstition, that no work of importance of any Christian writer within the three first centuries hath been permitted to come down to us, except those books which they have thought fit to adopt and transmit to us, as the canon of apostolic scripture; and the works of a few other writers, who were all of them, not only converts from Paganism, but men who had been educated and

well instructed in the philosophic schools of the later Platonists and Pythagoreans.

The established maxim of those schools was, that it was not lawful only, but commendable, to deceive and assert falsehoods, for the sake of promoting, what they thought, the cause of truth and piety: and the effects of this maxim, which was soon adopted by the orthodox and other sects of nominal Christians, produced that multiplicity of false and spurious writings, wherewith the latter end of the second and succeeding centuries abounded. For, as Professor Mosheim hath very justly observed,* "the Christian teachers, who had been instructed in the schools "of Sophists and Rhetoricians, transferred "the arts of their masters to the Christian "discipline, and adopted that mode of contending with their adversaries, in which "truth was not so much their aim as victory; "and they were confirmed in this practice "by the Platonists, who asserted, that a man "did no wrong who supported truth, when "hard pressed, by deceit and lies. This vicious eagerness, not to vanquish their adversaries by reason and fair argument, but "to overthrow and confound them," conti-

* Hist. Eccl. sæc. III. p. 2. c. iii.

nues the Professor, "produced so many "books, falsely attributed to persons of great "eminence and renown. For, since great "part of mankind are guided more by autho- "rity than by reason, or the word of God "itself; they thought it their best way to coun- "terfeit the authority of writers of the great- "est renown, to oppose to their antagonists."

There is also another well-known, incontestable proof of the deceit and falsehood of the orthodox Christians of early times, of which every person in the least conversant with the ecclesiastical history of those times, must be convinced—their pretended power of working miracles. From the history of the first age of the Gospel dispensation, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that the supernatural power of working miracles, which could only be intended to gain the new religion attention from the world, and to be a present testimony of its divine origin and authority, till the more lasting and more satisfactory proof of completed prophecy could take place, was communicated only two ways; first, by the signal, miraculous effusion of the holy inspiration, whereof there were but two instances, the one general, at the feast of Pentecost, which followed our

Lord's ascension; the other particular, in the house of Cornelius: and, secondly, by *the laying on of the hands of the Apostles*, a privilege confined, as appears from the story of Simon the Magician, and other circumstances, solely to the persons of the Apostles themselves. And as there is no record of their ever delegating, or of their having the power to delegate, this privilege to any other persons, it is manifest, that all the supernatural effects of that divine inspiration which was vouchsafed to the Christians of the apostolic age, must have ceased and determined with the lives of Christians of that generation; that is, before the expiration of the first half of the second century. Yet it is well known, that both the Fathers of the orthodox Church of the latter half of that century, and of the third, and the members of the same Church, after it was established by Constantine, during several succeeding centuries, pretended to the supernatural power of working miracles. But so indeed it was predicted* of the antichristian apostasy, that it should establish itself *by lying wonders*, and deceive the world by *falsehood* and pretended *miracles*.

* 2 Thess. ii. 9. &c. and Apoc. xiii. 14.

Since, then, the external evidence of the authenticity of the four Evangelical histories, is so very unsatisfactory to an unprejudiced mind; a rational inquirer into the truth of the Christian revelation, will consider thoroughly the internal evidence of veracity and authority which the histories themselves afford. For different composers of false, fictitious narratives, will, almost inevitably, be found frequently inconsistent with themselves, or with each other, and contradictory to obvious truth and probability.

VI. In this investigation, as the Gospel attributed to Matthew stands first in the canonical collection; as it is said to have been written by him, an eye-witness of what he records, by much the first in order of time, viz. about eight years after our Saviour's crucifixion; whereas Luke's appears to have been written at least twenty-eight years after that event; it should seem most regular to begin with that, and make it a sort of standard, by which we might compare the other three: but the very reading over the histories themselves in the original, with any critical attention, seems to render this impossible.

For it is to be observed, that the Gospels according to Matthew and Mark, contain not the slightest insinuation that their authors were apostles of Jesus Christ, or even men of the apostolic age; whilst the writer called Luke professes himself to have been a fellow-traveller of Paul; and is the author of two distinct histories, which, if we except some interpolations of the ραδιεργοι, the ready-fingered scribes of those times, which appear not difficult to be distinguished by an accurate, attentive reader, are perfectly rational, probable, and consistent, not only with themselves and with each other, but also with all other histories of the same times. That these histories were originally written by Luke in the language in which we have received them, is also unanimously asserted by all the writers of Christian antiquity. But it is not so with the Gospel attributed to Matthew. The only writers who inform us that he wrote any evangelical history, assure us he wrote it in Hebrew; and, one of the earliest, that he wrote it when Peter and Paul were preaching the Gospel and founding the Church at Rome; that is, at the Greek Calends; for there is no sufficient reason to induce us to believe, that

Peter, peculiarly the apostle to the Jews, as Paul was to the Gentiles, was ever at Rome: at least, he certainly was not there when Paul first went to Rome, in the beginning of Nero's reign; and yet we learn from the Acts, that then Paul founded the Christian Church at Rome, when he preached the Gospel there for two years, in his own hired house. And if we inquire how the Gospel received as Matthew's, came to be in Greek, if he wrote it in Hebrew; the same writers inform us, that it was afterwards translated into Greek: but we find, nobody knows when, where, or by whom. So far are they also from assuring us, that any one person, who understood both languages, had compared the translation with the original Hebrew, and certified its fidelity and correctness, that they do not even afford us any satisfactory evidence, that such an original copy was ever seen by any person capable of reading it. Surely, mankind are very easy of belief, in whatsoever is offered them under the pretended sanction of religion! otherwise they could never, under such circumstances, have been satisfied, that the Greek book which bears his name was really a correct and faithful translation of the He-

brew Gospel of Matthew, and have acquiesced in it for so many centuries, as the words of divine inspiration, even if it had been certain that Matthew actually wrote such a Gospel.

But a critical attention to the language of the Greek writing itself, compared with that of Luke's histories, seems sufficient to convince any impartial reader, that it cannot be a translation from any uniform original; that it must have been written long after Luke's second history, and Mark's after that; that both of them were of later date than Josephus's history, most probably not earlier than the latter end of Trajan's reign, or beginning of Adrian's; and that the writer of what we call Matthew's Gospel, is so far from being an Apostle, that his ignorance, both of the geography of Palestine, and of the customs of the Hebrew people, shew that he was not a Jew. To the same purpose might be alleged, his not understanding the prophecies of the Jewish scripture, particularly those applied by him in the first and second chapters: but as one of those he has quoted is an obvious forgery, existing in no part of the Old Testament, and since it is not possible that a

writer who had the whole of the other prophecies before him, either in the original or the Greek translation, could misunderstand their real meaning, and not be conscious that, if he had quoted any one of them entirely, it would have appeared to have had no relation to the subject of his history; the maimed, partial quotation, which he has given from each, must have been done designedly, and with intent to deceive those who were unacquainted with the Jewish scriptures: and therefore the author was assuredly one of those many champions of Orthodoxy with which the second and succeeding centuries abounded, who thought it allowable to support the religious system he had adopted, even by fraud and falsehood.

If the reader has patience enough to sustain the shock, which these assertions will most probably give to his earliest formed prejudices, and to peruse the following pages with a candid dispassionate mind, it is hoped he will be convinced, that, new and harsh as they may seem, they are far from being rash and unfounded; though in this place they are anticipated, merely as reasons for giving the preference to the histories of Luke, which

were certainly first in order of time; and for making them the standard of comparison between the several Evangelical histories. We will begin therefore with the Gospel according to Luke; and examine the internal evidence which it affords of its own, or of the authenticity of the others.

CHAPTER I.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE.

SECTION I.

IN this investigation, the first thing that presents itself to our observation in this Gospel, is the style and language in which it is written; which in both Luke's histories is, in general, not only pure and unexceptionable, but the diction and composition of the parables and speeches recorded by him, are so just and elegant, that, independently of the subjects on which he writes, as hath before been remarked by much abler critics, he well deserves to be reckoned amongst the fine writers of the Greek language. But the founders of the orthodox faith of the second century, were so ready at interpolating genuine, as well as at forging spurious writings, that we must not take it for granted, that the whole of what is received as Luke's histories, is in every part and passage just what he

wrote. I have already mentioned one famous passage, respecting a paradise, and the reasons why I think it a manifest interpolation. There are also some others, in each of his histories, which are liable to much reasonable distrust. Such, for instance, in his Gospel, is the story of the demoniac possessed by a legion of demons, who petitioned and were permitted to enter into the herd of swine; and, in the Acts of the Apostles, the passage which says, that diseases and lunacies were cured by handkerchiefs or aprons brought from Paul's body. In the first, there is every circumstance of improbability, and of inconsistency with the rest of the history, that can well be imagined; for Luke repeatedly speaks of what was then called by the ignorant, superstitious vulgar, *being possessed of demons*, and in more modern terms, *being bewitched*, as bodily diseases, which they undoubtedly were, and calls, what was termed casting out the demon, *healing* the patient; the exclamations therefore recorded by him in other cases, were evidently the ravings of the lunatics; and no preternatural cause of the disease is insinuated as subsisting, and acting, after the cure was effected: but in this story of the demoniac of Gadara, the man is

said, not, as when other demoniacs are mentioned, to have *an unclean spirit*, but, to *have many demons*. These demons also, as agents, quite distinct from the man, hold converse with Jesus, and, having obtained his permission, enter into and destroy an whole herd of swine.

Strong objections to the veracity of this story have been frequently urged, both from the great improbability of Jewish people keeping herds of swine, and from the universally benevolent, instead of injurious character, of our Lord himself: but there appear to occur still stronger objections against it, from the history itself; and such as may well warrant a conclusion, that the whole passage was interpolated in the second century. For in the preceding part of Luke's narrative, we find our Lord was at Capernaum, on the western side of the Lake or Sea of Galilee; and, in the eighth chapter, he takes ship with his disciples, to *go unto the other side* of the Lake, without doubt, to preach the Gospel to those parts of Palestine which were situated on the eastern side; but, according to this most extraordinary story of the demoniac and the herd of swine, almost as soon as he was landed on the eastern shore, the Gada-

renes, terrified and alarmed by the injurious though miraculous destruction of their swine, entreated him to leave their coasts: and he accordingly *went up into the ship, and returned back again* to Capernaum. In Galilee, therefore, on the western side of the Lake, he ought to be found in the following part of the history; yet, in the very next chapter, we are plainly told, without the slightest insinuation of his having crossed the Lake again, that he was on the eastern side of the Lake; for from thence he sent out his twelve Apostles, and thither they returned to him again: because, immediately on their return, *he took them aside into a desert place belonging to the city Bethsaida*, which we learn from Josephus,* who, having had the command of the forces of the Jews in that district, must have been perfectly acquainted with the situation of every town upon the Lake, was on the eastern side† of the Sea of Galilee. If then this very exceptionable miracle be an interpolation, and not part of the original writing of Luke, the narrative proceeds consistently and regularly: but if it be taken as authentic, there is such a geographical confusion

* Josephus, p. 1066. Ed. Hudson.

† See Josephus, Ant. Lib. xviii. c. iii.

and disorder in this part of the history, as occurs no where else in this author's works; and such as can neither be allowed, nor indeed supposed, in an historian, who, writing upon a subject of the greatest importance, sets out with professing to write accurately and *in order*.

There is, however, another circumstance in this story of the demoniac, as also in the passage cited as objectionable in the Acts of the Apostles, which, if considered as it deserves, appears very satifactorily to evince the spuriousness of both passages, and even to point out nearly the date of their interpolation: which is, that the word *legion* in the first, and the words *aprons* and *handkerchiefs* in the second, are not Greek, but Latin words written in Greek characters.

When different and distant nations, by the means either of conquest or commerce, have much and frequent intercourse with each other, they must of necessity soon adopt the proper names of many places and persons, and also of coins, and perhaps of some measures, in use amongst each other; but in all other cases, where the words of one language are capable of being rendered by corresponding words of the other, the writers in the one

will not adopt the words of the other and use them as their own, especially where the characters, in which the two languages are written, are totally different, till after a great length of time, and a concurrence of many particular circumstances, have introduced such a custom. And, with respect to the Greek and Latin languages in particular, the Romans themselves acknowledged the Greeks to be so superior to them in the arts and sciences, and their language so much more copious and expressive than their own, that for many ages after their first intercourse with the nations who spoke Greek, instead of the Greeks introducing Latin words into their language, the Roman writers were continually adding to their native tongue, by the adoption of words and phrases from the Greek. It is not probable, therefore, that common Latin words were adopted into the Greek language by any, and still less so by good writers, till after the arms and arrogant haughtiness of the Romans, and the servile adulation of the conquered provinces, had been carried to their greatest height; that is, till the latter end of the reign of Trajan, or beginning of the second century of the Christian æra. The conquests of

Rome reached their utmost extent under that Emperor: and the consequent insolence of the Roman Nobility, and fawning servility, even of Philosophers and men of letters amongst the Greeks, so indignantly described by Lucian* not long afterwards, easily account for the adulatory practice of later Greek writers, in affecting to borrow words from the Latin; as if the language of the Romans was more copious and expressive than the Greek, and as much superior to the languages, as their arms had proved to the arms, of all other nations. I do not recollect any Greek writer of note who has adopted such a practice, prior to the historian Herodian, in the third century. But Lucian, in his tract upon the proper manner of writing history, Sect. 15, tells us, that one of the Greek historians of Aurelian's war with the Parthians, which was not ended till the year 164, though a professed imitator of the style of Thucydides, had adopted many Roman names of arms and machines, and even those of a foss, a bridge, and the like. His manner of noticing it, however, and the indignation he expresses at seeing

* In his discourse about those Greeks who were hired to be companions to the wealthy Romans.

the language of Attica interspersed with Italic words, as if by way of ornament, shews that the practice even then was quite novel; and therefore it cannot be supposed to have been in use at all earlier than near the middle of the second century. At least, that it was not in use some time after the writings of Luke's histories, appears evidently from the writings of Josephus, who, though he composed some of his works in the very camp of Titus, and was induced by every consideration to adopt such a mode of expression, as was most likely to please the Emperor and ingratiate himself with the Romans, instead of using Latin military terms, even those which had no directly corresponding term in the Greek language, such as *Legio* for instance, never once writes the Latin word itself in Greek characters, but translates it by an original Greek word, denoting a corps of soldiers regularly arrayed. In the same manner, in every other passage of Luke's histories where a Roman legion is mentioned, it is expressed by a Greek word which signifies a band or collection of soldiers, even where some particular Legion* is spoken of to distinguish it from the others, and consequently

* Legio Italica, Legio Augusti.

where there was some reason to consider the Roman appellation as a kind of proper name of that particular corps.

This seems satisfactorily to demonstrate, that, in and after the age of Luke, it was not usual for writers in Greek to adopt words from the Latin language, even in military terms peculiar to the Romans, much less to borrow Roman words, as in the passage quoted from the Acts, to express, in Greek, articles of dress or personal convenience in common use amongst both nations. If therefore we could suppose a lunatic of the Hebrew common people, intending, according to the story, to make a company of Jews apprehend that *many demons had entered into him*, upon being asked his name, (a question, by the way, which seems to be asked for no other purpose than merely to draw forth the conceit of the term Legion) would pass over all the literal or figurative terms of multitude, in common use amongst the Jews, and adopt a Latin word, never used in such a signification even by the Romans themselves; yet still the historian, when relating the circumstance, would undoubtedly have rendered the term Legion by the same Greek word which he hath used to express it on every other occasion.

I must confess that this single circumstance of the language strikes my mind so strongly, that I suspect every passage and writing, wherein it is found, to be either an interpolation or fiction of no earlier date than the middle of the second century; and, if corroborated by other circumstances of inconsistency or great improbability, it affords to me a full conviction of their spuriousness and want of apostolic authenticity.

If the plain, express dictates of the Lord Jesus himself could not escape free from material alterations and additions, by the pens of copyists of these books, in the third, fourth, or fifth centuries, what other parts of them can we suppose secure from their daring interpolations, whenever they hoped to serve by them the cause of their particular religious system? Yet, that the concise, instructive formula, in which Luke tells us, he, at their own request, taught his disciples to pray to God, has been so interpolated out of the Gospel called Matthew's—the latest eminent editor of the Christian Scriptures in their original language, that learned and diligent collator, professor Griesbach, has so satisfactorily shewn, from the earliest comments upon, and the best authenticated copies of,

Luke's Gospel now existing, that he himself has rejected the additions out of the original text of that prayer; and, in so doing, has been followed by the late learned and candid Primate of Ireland, Archbishop Newcome, in his English translation of the New Testament. And we now know that the Lord's Prayer, as originally recorded by this Evangelist, consisted only of the following words —Luke xi. 2—4: *Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.* Now we may reasonably ask, what unprejudiced, reflecting mind does not perceive, that those interpolated words which assign a local habitation to God, in heaven, are as incongruous to the attribute of omnipresence, which both reason and revelation teach us is essential to the Deity, as the insinuation that his will is not done upon earth, is to his omnipotence or wisdom? And with what propriety can men pray to God, to deliver them from evil, when, under the all-directing providence of an almighty, benevolent Being, no evil can be supposed to exist, but for the wise and gracious purpose of producing final good?

After so convincing a proof of the daring, unwarrantable liberties taken with this most important and sacred part of the evangelical history of Luke, for the purpose of making it more conformable to that attributed to Matthew, one sees clearly, that for the same purpose, from the fabulous fictions of the same source, Luke's history has been interpolated also, with the story of the baptism of Jesus, by John; of his forty days' fasting; and most extraordinary kind of temptation by some *powerful* antagonist of *omnipotence*, here called the Devil; and of his transfiguration on the mountain. For it well deserves our notice, that if we pass from the account of John's imprisonment, by Herod, Luke iii. 20, to iv. 14, and read, *Then came Jesus*, instead of, *and Jesus returned*, the histories both of John and Jesus proceed regularly and in order; and the ministry of Jesus, as is most probable, commenced upon the cessation of the Baptist's ministry, by his being *shut up in prison*.* But if the account of our Lord's being baptized by John were genuine, Herod's imprisoning the latter must have been related very much out of its proper order; and Luke would have given us no date for

* See Acts x. 37.

the commencement of our Lord's ministry, which, it was reasonably to be expected, an historian would have done, who professes to relate every thing accurately and *in order*, though he has been so particularly exact in fixing the date of the commencement of John's preaching. Besides, the purpose of John's mission was merely to prepare the Jews, for the reception of the Messiah and his new covenant, by preaching to them *the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*; and, to say nothing of *the bodily shape like a dove*, which savours strongly of the superstition of the second century, with what propriety could he, *who knew no sin*, receive such a baptism? or the destined Messiah attend the preaching of his own precursor, to be prepared by him for the coming of himself? And what probability is there, that our Lord would have studiously avoided calling himself *the Son of God*, during his whole ministry; and forbidden his disciples before his death, to announce him as such to the Jews, if God himself had miraculously declared him to be so, by a voice from heaven, in the audience of so great a multitude? Or how could John, after such an attestation, have ever entertained a doubt whether Jesus was

the expected Messiah;—which, from Luke vii. 18, 19, &c. it appears he did entertain. As to the account of the transfiguration, it is so directly contradictory to the repeated doctrine of the Gospel, that Jesus was the first man whom God raised from the dead, that it cannot be a true, authentic story. For whatever may be thought of Elias, Moses, we are expressly assured, *died*, and was *buried*: if, therefore, he was alive in the reign of Tiberius, and visited our Saviour on the Mount, Moses, and not Jesus, must have been *the first fruits* from the dead.

But there is a part of the Gospel according to Luke of much greater magnitude and importance, which, from the testimony of Luke himself, as well as from the numerous circumstances of inconsistency and improbability that attend it, we need not hesitate to pronounce none of his, but the daring fiction of some of the *easy working* interpolators, as Origen calls them, of the beginning of the second century, from amongst the pagan converts: who, to do honour, as they deemed it, to the author of their newly-embraced religion, were willing that his birth should, at least, equal that of the pagan heroes and demi-gods, Bacchus and Hercules, in its won-

derful circumstances and high descent; and thereby laid the foundation of the succeeding orthodox deification of the man Jesus, which, in degree of blasphemous absurdity, exceeds even the gross fables of pagan superstition: inasmuch as it makes him equal in Godhead, power, and even in eternity of existence, with his celestial Sire, the supreme Deity himself. What I mean is, the whole of the two first chapters, which follows the short introductory preface to Theophilus, containing the narrative of the birth of John the Baptist, and the history of the birth, infancy, and twelve first years of the life of our Lord Jesus.

To an impartial reader many difficulties will occur in this part of the history attributed to Luke, besides the repeated appearance of an Angel under the same appellation, by which Daniel denominates one that appeared to him in his prophetic visions, as if the word Gabriel did not signify a celestial being in human form, that is, an Angel; but as if Angels like Men were distinguished from each other by proper names: and he will find no small stumbling block at the very threshold. For Elizabeth is said to be not only of the tribe of Levi, but, *of the daughters of Aaron;* and yet she is spoken of as nearly related to

Mary, who if there could be any truth in the story of the miraculous birth of Jesus, must necessarily have been, in an uninterrupted line, of the tribe of Judah and family of David, to make him, in any sense, a descendant from that Prince. It is true that among the Jews, heiresses alone were forbidden to marry out of their own tribe, but since the whole tribe of Levi, and more especially the family of Aaron, were separated from all the other tribes and families, and peculiarly sanctified and appropriated to the rites and offices of their religion; it is in the highest degree improbable that *they* should intermarry with any other tribe. Neither is it at all probable, that the providence of the Almighty should destine the Jewish prophecies, respecting the Messiah and his precursor, to be accomplished in two persons, related by consanguinity to each other; and whose parents were so intimately connected, as might afford the incredulous strong grounds whereon to apprehend some family-collusion in the case, and to suspect the pretensions, of both the cousins, to distinguished regard, of artful imposture.

Had the familiar intimacy, described by the author of these two chapters, and which is so

natural and usual amongst relations, really subsisted between the mothers of John and Jesus, strengthened and increased as it must have been by the very extraordinary circumstances of the two angelic annunciations, and the two miraculous conceptions, the two children must have passed great part of their early years together; must have been informed by their parents, and those about them, of the angelic and human testimonies, the predictions and uncommon events respecting each of them; and have grown up in habits of mutual regard and personal intercourse and intimacy, at least, to the time of John's retiring into the wilderness. Yet, if we might rely upon the testimony of the Baptist himself, as recorded by the Gospel attributed to the apostle John, he was an intire stranger to Jesus when he came to be baptised by him; and he should not have known him to be the predicted Messiah, but for an immediate revelation from heaven. But though this palpable inconsistency, between these two histories, affords one striking proof of the easy credulity of those who receive them both for authentic scripture, and even as the inspired, infallible word of God, no stress is laid upon it, in the

case before us, for reasons which will appear hereafter. What is much more to our present purpose is, that this whole history of the consanguinity and intimate familiarity between Mary and Elizabeth, is equally irreconcileable to the subsequent narration of Luke himself. For in the seventh chapter he informs us, that upon the fame of Jesus being celebrated throughout the Land, on account of the wonderful miracles effected by him, the disciples of John, who was at that time confined in prison by Herod, related to him all that past concerning the new prophet Jesus: and we find that John, like a person unacquainted with Jesus, and uncertain whether he was the Messiah, the promised prophet, to whose appearance his own mission and preaching were only preparatory, sent two of his disciples to ask him the question in direct terms, whether he really was the predicted Messiah, or they were to expect another person to fulfil that important character. In his answer, our Lord, instead of reminding him of the angelic testimonies of his being the true Messiah, which he must know preceded both their miraculous births, and of the subsequent testimonies of his own father Zacharias, and the

prophet and prophetess, Simeon and Anna, refers him only to some well known predictions of Isaiah respecting the Messiah, which John's messengers saw were then singularly accomplished in his wonderful works. Now it seems absolutely impossible that John, after being from his earliest infancy personally acquainted with Jesus, and not only in possession of all the information respecting him, which he must have learnt from the two families, but so miraculously impressed with affection and reverence for him, as to exult for joy, though but an embryo in the womb, at the mere sound of his mother's voice, could, at any time, have entertained the least doubt of Jesus being the Messiah. And since circumstances and facts of such public notoriety, must have been known to the disciples of both, if their masters were faithful instructors —as indeed it is evident they were, if the two chapters in question were written by Luke— it appears to be next to impossible, if not quite so, that any serious, consistent writer should be the author of the first chapter, and afterwards relate the story of John's embassy, without the smallest reference to the contradictory narrative of that chapter, and without

a single remark upon either the unaccountable incredulity or farcical absurdity of John, displayed in such a legation.

In the first chapter also, the Angel is made to inform Mary, that the child to be born of her should be called *the Son of God*, and for this reason, because it was to be produced by the Holy Ghost coming upon her, and the power of the highest over-shadowing her: yet in the subsequent part of his history, Luke, as if he meant directly to contradict this heavenly annunciator, except in the acclamations of some lunatics, never once mentions him by any other appellation than *Son of Man* or *Son of David*, till after his resurrection. Then, indeed, he speaks of him as being commonly and publicly called *the Son of God;* but in the discourses of the Apostles, where they call him so, they give a very different reason for it from that alleged by the Angel; and refer for the cause of it, not to any circumstances of his carnal birth, but to his being raised from the dead to a new and spiritual life, by the immediate power of the Almighty. Indeed were the story of his miraculous birth undoubted truth, yet, since it could be certainly known to be so by no mortal besides Mary herself, it could not be

of sufficient notoriety to induce men to call him by that name; especially since, in the whole course of his own and his Apostles' preaching the Gospel, the circumstance of his preternatural conception is not once mentioned, nor so much as alluded to. The falsehood, however, of this prediction of the pretended Angel, that he should be called *Son of God* because of his miraculous birth, appears incontestibly from other scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, which teach us that *the Son of God* was so far from being a title which the Messiah promised to the Jews, acquired from any wonderful circumstances of his nativity, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, that he had been commonly spoken of under that very denomination long before his birth, even from the time of his progenitor David; for that God himself had given him that appellation in the prophecies of him recorded in the book of Psalms, where, speaking to and of this future descendant of David, in the name of his forefather, he says, "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten "thee;" and again, "he shall be to me a Son "and I will be to him a Father;" and again, "I will make him, my first-born, higher than "the Kings of the Earth." Now that Jesus

could not become *the first-born* of God, in any sense respecting his human birth, is evident, because in that sense Adam was beyond all controversy his *first-born*. And that the begetting here spoken of had not the least reference to the carnal birth of the Messiah, but to his regeneration after death, to a new and spiritual state of existence, in which he is truly the *first-born* of God, is expressly taught us by the Apostles in their discourses to the Jews, recorded by Luke himself, in his history of their Acts.

From Luke's own narrative of what passed at our Lord's examination before the Jewish council, previous to their accusation of him before Pilate, it is evident that, in the estimation of the Jews, occasioned, without doubt, by the above quoted prophecies, to declare a person to be *the Christ*, or to declare him to be *the Son of God*, was exactly the same thing; for intending to render him obnoxious to the Roman Governor, as a rebel against the authority of Cæsar, the only point on which they examined him was, whether he avowed himself to be *the Christ*, that is, the person, of whom their prophecies predicted, that God would anoint him to reign over them to the end of time: to which he

answered, that if he told them he was so, they would not believe him, neither, if he attempted to argue with them, about the meaning of their prophecies, would they answer him nor let him go. But, adds he, *from this time forth* (so it should have been translated) shall he, who, at present, assumes no title nor character but *the Son of Man*, be exalted to that super-eminent station of empire and authority, which, in the 110th Psalm, is prophesied of by the term, *sitting on the right hand of the power of God*. Knowing that to be a prophecy of the Messiah, that Son of David, whom God had promised to make his own *Son*, and *first-born*, and with reason supposing himself to be the Son of Man he spake of, they all exclaimed together, *art thou then the Son of God?* art thou the *Son of Man*, who is to be exalted to the glorious character of *Son of God?* And on his acknowledging himself to be so, they cried out, *what need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth*; and immediately conducted him to Pilate, and accused him of *perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar*, by *saying, that he himself was Christ, a King*. *The Christ*, therefore, or anointed King, and *the Son of God*, had pre-

cisely the same meaning. Yet both our Lord himself and his Apostles, expressly teach us, that he could not become the *Christ*, or *Son of God*, but by his resurrection after death to a new and spiritual life. Even in his life time, he taught the Sadducees, that it was the being raised from the dead, by the immediate vivifying power of God himself, which alone could make him or any man the *Son of God*; when he told them that, "they which "shall be accounted worthy to obtain that "world and the resurrection from the dead, "are equal unto the Angels, and are *the* "*Children of God*, being the Children of the "resurrection." And to lead them to apply this instruction, that men became *Sons of God* by a resurrection to a future life, to the particular case of the predicted Messiah or Christ, and thereby to a right understanding of their own prophecies respecting himself, immediately after this defence and explanation of the doctrine of the resurrection, he asks how the Scribes could say that any Son of David would, as such, be the expected Christ: when David himself, in the very prophecies concerning him, acknowledges the Christ to be his Lord? plainly intimating, that by dying to this mortal life, he must

cease to be David's Son, and by a resurrection to a spiritual life, be made *the Son of God*, before he could become *the Christ*, and be exalted to that high degree of celestial power, which is called being *seated at the right hand of God*, where he would be Lord, not only over David, but over all the generations of men, whether dead or living. To the same purpose, after his resurrection, Luke assures us, he expounded the prophecies respecting himself, to the two disciples at Emmaus, and afterwards to the whole assembly of disciples at Jerusalem; to convince them, that it was necessary he should have suffered death and burial before he could enter into the glorious character of *the Christ*. Impressed with this conviction, Peter, on the memorable day of Pentecost, explains the same prophecies to the Jews in general; informs them of the actual resurrection from the dead of this promised Son of David, and that the miraculous gift of tongues, which they then witnessed, was the influence of that power to which God had, since his ascension into heaven, exalted him; and adds, "therefore let all the house of Is-"rael know assuredly that God hath made "that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified,

"both Lord and Christ." Paul also, some time after, preaching at Antioch, interprets the predictions of the Messiah, contained in the book of Psalms, in the very same manner; and particularly refers to the resurrection, for that birth, whereby he was made *the Son of God*. "The promise," says the Apostle, "which was made unto the Fathers, God "hath fulfilled the same unto us, their chil-"dren, in that he hath raised up Jesus again, "as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten "thee." And the author of the Epistle to the Romans, in the same spirit of interpretation, asserts that Jesus Christ "was made of "the seed of David according to the flesh;" that is, at his first birth, was the natural born Son of David, and "determined, or consti-"tuted, *the Son of God*, with power, accord-"ing to the spirit of holiness, by" his second birth, "the resurrection from the dead."

But the falsehood of the pretended Angel respecting the reason of our Lord's being denominated *the Son of God*, is not the only inconsistency between this Pagan fable of the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent narrative of both the histories written by Luke. It contains in it a contra-

diction of much greater importance, which, if admitted to be true, would destroy the very fundamental article of the Christian Faith, as Luke himself informs us it was originally preached both by our Lord and his apostles; and would utterly overthrow every pretension of Jesus to be the Messiah predicted in the scriptures of the Old Testament. For the prophecies concerning the Messiah, in the books of Moses, assure us that he was to be *the seed*, that is, the natural born descendant of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob, and Judah; to which subsequent predictions add, that he should also be *the Son* or *seed* of David; and that he was to be a prophet, *raised up* from amongst the Jewish people, *like unto Moses*. Under these prophecies, our Saviour claimed the title of the promised Messiah or Christ, in his conversations with his Apostles after his resurrection; and to the completion of these same prophecies in their Master's person, the Apostles themselves constantly appealed, in preaching his Gospel to their brethren the Jews. They assert,* that he was *the seed* of Abraham, promised and sent to bless all mankind; that† he was *the seed* of

* Acts iii. 25 and 26. Gal. iii. 16.

† Acts ii. 30. xiii. 23.—2 Tim. ii. 8.

David; *the fruit of his loins*; the* predicted Jewish prophet like unto Moses. It necessarily follows, therefore, either that our Lord Jesus was such a Jewish prophet as Moses, and the naturally descended Son of Abraham and David, or he was not the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Jewish prophecies; and all our faith in him, as such, is vain. The futile sophistry of school divines is well known, whereby they attempt to satisfy the prejudices of *orthodox* minds, respecting these prophetic descriptions of the Messiah, suggesting a partial resemblance between Moses and the miraculously conceived Son of Mary, in their common characters of mediators, and deliverers, and promulgers of God's will to Men; and supposing that nothing more is meant by his being the lineal descendant of Abraham and David, than his being, though in a preternatural manner, the offspring of a daughter of Abraham and David: but the express words of the sacred scriptures themselves, will by no means warrant these miserable subterfuges of bigotted superstition.

The words of Moses are, "God will raise "thee up *from amongst thy brethren*, a pro- "phet like unto me;" that is, will exalt a

* Acts iii. 22.—vii. 37.

common Jewish man like myself to the distinguished character of such a prophet as I am. Now a God, or an Angel incarnate, though commissioned to every office that Moses was, is so far from being one of the Jewish people *raised up* to the prophetic character, that it is a being, infinitely, or transcendently superior to any man, *degraded* into the station of an human prophet: and even a mere Man, created without the intervention of an human Father, by the miraculous influence of God himself on the mother, is not one of the Jewish people like Moses, nor like any thing else that was ever heard or read of, except in the absurd, fabulous legends of pagan mythology. Neither will the derivation of Mary's genealogy from David and Abraham at all remove the obvious contradiction between this story of the miraculous conception of her son, and those scriptures which assert, that he was the *seed* of Abraham and the *fruit of the loins* of David; for the female, from whatsoever family descended, is no more than the seed-bed formed to mature the seed of the male; and therefore, in the genealogies of all nations, the children are accounted the *seed* or lineal descendants of the male line only, without any regard to the family, or even the

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nation, of the female. Thus, for example, David is justly accounted the seed of Abraham, and as true an Israelite as any other descendant from Jacob, though he and his father Jesse were the offspring of Obed, the son of a Moabitish woman. Were it true, therefore, that the Almighty, in the single instance of Mary's conception, had miraculously created seed, like that of the human species, to become an embryo in her womb, to be matured and brought forth like other children, after the usual period of gestation; yet such a child would no more be the seed of Abraham, nor the fruit of David's loins, than Adam himself. He would be the seed of no man; but, like the first created of our species, the immediate production of the plastic power of God. For this reason, either this very extraordinary history of Mary's miraculous conception of her son Jesus, must be false and fabulous, or else Jesus is not the Messiah promised to the Jews.

Ever since these two chapters annexed to Luke's history, and the Gospel according to Matthew, have been acknowledged by the Fathers of the orthodox Church to be the genuine writings of Matthew and Luke, that is, ever since the latter half of the second cen-

ury of the Christian æra, the miraculous conception of Jesus by a virgin has been taught, referred to, and commented upon, by every apologist for the orthodox religion, and every expositor of those four Gospels, which the Church of Constantine, some ages later, formally decreed in council to be the only true, apostolic histories of the Gospel; has been a fundamental article of the orthodox faith, and, as such, expressly recited in every creed or formulary of belief which has ever been in use. It is evident, indeed, that this must necessarily have been the case. And, for the same reasons, if this story of the preternatural origin of our Lord Jesus, had been known and credited by the apostles and first preachers of Christianity, they also must have mentioned it in their discourses and letters of instruction to their converts, and instead of dwelling upon prophecies concerning the descent of the Messiah, absolutely incompatible with so extraordinary a circumstance, without once alluding to it, they must have enumerated it amongst the necessary articles of a Christian's belief. Yet in no one apostolic Epistle, in no one discourse recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, is the miraculous conception, or in any one circumstance of, the

history of Jesus, previous to John's Baptism, hinted at even in the most distant manner: on the contrary, that Baptism is repeatedly* referred to and mentioned as the proper commencement of evangelical instruction; and when the eleven Apostles proceeded to elect a twelfth, to supply the place of Judas, the only qualification made essentially requisite in the candidates was, their having been eye-witnesses of our Lord's ministry, from the Baptism of John to his Ascension. Now, to lay no stress upon the dissimilarity of style observable between these two first chapters and the rest of Luke's histories, and the affected, but sometimes unsuccessful imitation† of his common phraseology, nor upon the inconsistency of the stories they contain, of the prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna, with the well known historic truth, that there never was a prophet amongst the Jews, from the time of their return from their captivity to the preaching of John the Baptist, it appears impossible that any writer, though of

* Acts i. 22.—x. 37.—xiii. 23, 24.

† For example, this interpolated fable begins with the same word ἐγένετο, with which Luke begins most of his paragraphs; but in Luke it always means, it came to pass, or he was made, or became, and never, *there was*, which is its only meaning here, and for which Luke always uses ἦν.

a degree of respectability much inferior to what Luke is, on many accounts, justly entitled to, should so grossly, so absurdly contradict himself in the same history, without so much as attempting to reconcile, or even noticing, such palpable inconsistencies; and, had we no other grounds to proceed upon, we need not hesitate to pronounce, that the writer of the twenty-six last chapters, and of the Acts of the Apostles, could not be the author of the wonderful two first chapters of the Gospel according to Luke.

Happily, however, for the cause of truth and rational religion, we have Luke's own testimony to convince us, that this is the case; and do not depend upon any man's inferences or opinion. He has addressed both his histories to the same Theophilus; and in the address, which is introductory to his second book, he gives an accurate description of the contents of the first. "The former treatise," says he, "I have made of all that Jesus began "to do and to teach, until the day in which "he was taken up." That is, my former book is a history of the acts and doctrine of Jesus, from their first commencement to his ascension. Luke himself, therefore, assures us, (and a writer's word may surely be taken for

the contents of his own work) that his first history went no higher than the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, and ended with his ascension into heaven. Now, if we turn to the third chapter of what is called the Gospel according to Luke, we find the proper, regular commencement of an accurate history, specifying, with precision, in what year of the reigning Emperor, and under what subordinate Magistrates of the several divisions of Palestine, the Baptism of John, which immediately preceded the public ministry of Jesus, took place; and ending in the twenty-fourth chapter, as Luke himself describes it, with a brief account of his ascension. And this history, so accurately described by the author of it, comprises only a period of two years; whilst the two first chapters, of which Luke takes not the least notice, comprehend a history of near fourteen years, beginning, according to the generally received opinion, full thirty years before John's Baptism and the commencement of our Lord's ministry; which Luke himself mentions to Theophilus, for whose information both his books were written, as the beginning of his first treatise. Nay, even in his introduction to his Evangelical history itself, he in reality asserts the

very same thing, that it commenced with the account of the Baptism of John: for he tells Theophilus, that to the end he might know the certainty of the doctrine in which he had been instructed, having diligently investigated every circumstance *from the very first*, after the example of many others, he had written for him a regular narration of those things, of which they had received a full assurance, having been taught them by those, who *from the beginning* were eye-witnesses, and were made ministers of the Christian doctrine, that is, by the Apostles. Now it is evident, that *the beginning* and *the very first*, here alluded to, must be the public preaching and baptism of John, not only because that is the æra of the Christian instruction determined by the Apostles themselves, as hath been before remarked, from their election of Matthias and their own preaching recorded in the Acts; but also because the full assurance of the disciples here mentioned, depended upon the circumstance of their teachers having been eye-witnesses of the facts they taught; and since, before the mission of the Baptist, the Apostles were all strangers both to John and Jesus, they could not have been eye-witnesses of any fact antecedent to it, nor, of course,

to any thing related in those two first chapters. As to the fundamental article of the faith of the church of Constantine, the miraculous conception of Jesus, it is not capable of being assured by the testimony of any eye-witness whatsoever.

There is also another unaccountable inconsistency between the story of the miraculous conception, and the subsequent history of Luke, as it now stands; I mean, the genealogy of Jesus to prove his lineal descent from David and Abraham: for it is the genealogy of Joseph, which indeed, if Jesus be allowed to be his natural born son, and the genealogy to be a correct one, would answer the purpose of proving him to be, in that respect, the object of the prophecies concerning the family of the Messiah contained in the Pentateuch and the book of Psalms; but if his miraculous birth related in the first chapter be admitted, he was no more the son of Joseph than of Pontius Pilate; and to answer any, even the sophistical purpose of a polemic divine on the occasion, the writer should have given us the genealogy of Mary, and not of Joseph. Such a genealogy, however, derived from the female line, could not have been allowed by any Jew, nor indeed by any unprejudiced person;

for in every country, and more especially where a plurality of wives is customary, as in Judea, men being at liberty to marry women, not only of any family, but of any nation, were the caprice of deriving a genealogy from the female instead of the male to be indulged, the same man's children might be proved to be of different families, and perhaps of different nations, and the confusion of pedigrees would be inexplicable. By taking the mother's side at Obed, David's grandfather, David, and consequently his descendant, the Messiah, might be proved to be a Moabite, the offspring of the incestuous bed of Lot, instead of being proved an Israelite, the lineal, legitimate son of Abraham: for which reason, even the genealogy attributed to Matthew is the genealogy of Joseph, not of Mary. However, this additional contradictory circumstance is not much to be insisted on, because it must be frankly confessed, that there is room for doubts likewise about the authenticity of this genealogy; for from the second letter of Paul to Timothy, compared with Luke's own history of the Apostles, it appears that Luke was the constant, faithfully attached disciple, friend, and companion, of Paul; and therefore it is most probable he

had approved and adopted the same precepts and instructions, which Paul urged upon his other disciples; and, in his first letter to Timothy, we find Paul earnestly dissuading him from *giving heed to endless genealogies*, as furnishing matter of dispute and *vain jangling*, rather than *Godly*, *edifying*, and Christian *charity*. There is, therefore, very strong reason to believe that the genealogy was not contained in the original history as written by Luke. In the list of the twelve apostles, also given ch. vi. 13, compared with that which the author has given us in his second history, i. 13, there is a perturbation of the order of their enumeration, evidently occasioned by a similar interpolation from the Gospel according to Matthew, with what we have seen was practised respecting the Lord's Prayer, in order to make Luke agree with the pretended Matthew, in asserting the Apostle Andrew to be Simon Peter's brother. Although from the whole tenor of Luke's history of Peter, in both his books, it plainly appears, that he had no brother; and that between him and Andrew, there was no domestic connexion of any kind. But of this, more when we come to the Gospel of Matthew. There are also two or three other

passages of little moment, not mentioned on this occasion, of which, from some suspicious circumstances attending them, or from their abrupt incoherence with both the preceding and following sentences, one is tempted to exclaim, *assuitur pannus !* This savours much of a patch tacked on by some interpolating copyist of the second century !

CHAPTER II.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE,

CONTINUED.

SECTION I.

THE before mentioned passages excepted, the *internal* evidence of both these histories, the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, agrees with the *external* testimony of all the earliest writers, that they were written by Luke, who was not himself indeed an Apostle, but one of the first converts amongst the Jews, a disciple, and personal attendant, of the Apostles: for though the author does not call himself Luke, but Silas, yet he professes to have been the companion and fellow traveller of Paul, which from Paul's Epistles we learn that he really was. These histories also, which contain a record of the principal transactions amongst the first Christians, during a period of above thirty years, are perfectly consistent with themselves and each other, and with the

Jewish and Roman histories of the same period: and the talents, the temper, and thorough information of his subject, displayed by the writer, are such as would vindicate his credibility, and claim our respect, in any ordinary historian.

But in the historian of a supernatural event, such as the promulgation of a divine revelation of the will of God to Man, still more is requisite. The duly authorized promulger must necessarily be enabled to produce immediate acts of miraculous power, in attestation of the truth of his divine mission, and to confirm it by the more sober, rational, and satisfactory testimony of prophecy. The history of such a person, therefore, must contain a relation of those miracles, and of the several events predicted by the extraordinary messenger, before they came to pass: and, before we give implicit credit to the veracity of the relater, reason suggests, that we should examine whether the recorded miracles be such as are properly adapted to the circumstances of the case, and worthy of the interposition of that almighty being, by whose power only they could have been effected; *an Deo dignus vindice nodus*? For no reasoning mind can think it probable, that the

divine fountain of all wisdom, as well as of all power, should enable any person to work miracles for trivial, unimportant purposes; much less such as are inconsistent with equity and goodness, or any other of his eternal, immutable attributes. And with regard to the predictions he records, we should consider whether the events are such as human sagacity could not foresee; whether they are predicted to take place at such different intervals as to afford the indispensably requisite testimony of completed prophecy to the hearers of that time, and to all succeeding generations: and above all, whether such of them, the period of whose accomplishment is already past, have really been completed. It will be necessary, therefore, to examine both the miracles and predictions attributed to Jesus Christ, in the Gospel according to Luke, in these points of view.

II. In considering the recorded miracles, and the degree of probability which arises from their propriety, the leading criterion must be the genius and spirit of the revelation, the divine authority of which they are intended to attest. Thus in the religion revealed by Moses, in an age of the world when the un-

improved, unenlightened state of human reason, taken in the aggregate, may be justly deemed the intellectual childhood of mankind, the chief object intended by it being, to preserve a just and rational idea of the Deity amongst men, till the maturity of their reasoning faculties, and an increase of light and knowledge should render them capable of a purer and more spiritual religion; and, for that purpose, to teach the Jews that, both as individuals, and as a nation, they and all mankind depended solely upon the power and providence of the one true God, for every instance of temporal prosperity or adversity, for their preservation or destruction. Nothing could accord better with the genius and intent of that revelation than the miracles wrought in Egypt and at the Red Sea, to effect their deliverance from Pharaoh's tyranny, and afterwards amongst themselves, during their peregrination in the Wilderness; because they could not fail of making a lasting, national impression upon their minds, and convincing them of the tremendous power of God to accomplish all those temporal blessings or curses which were the sanction of that Law of Fear. But to gain attention to the heavenly promulgation of the New Covenant,

the Evangelical Law of Love, which teaches mankind to look up to the supreme Deity with grateful affection, as to their common Father, Friend, and Benefactor, and to regard the whole human race as brethren entitled to every instance of kindness, beneficence, and love from each other, miracles of a very different nature seem obviously requisite to make them correspond with the intent and spirit of the revelation itself. Accordingly, in the history which Luke hath given us of instances of miraculous power exerted in proof of the divine authority of their mission, both by Jesus Christ himself and his Apostles, if we except the interpolated miracle of the destruction of the herd of swine, and the* miraculous suppression of the dangerous storm which had alarmed the fears of his disciples in crossing the Lake, (a miracle singularly calculated to confirm their entire confidence in the protection of that almighty power by which their Master was commissioned to preach the Gospel) they are all

* I have omitted the wonderful draught of fishes, not knowing whether it be universally admitted to be a miracle. Yet, considering the situation and circumstances of the Apostles, no miraculous act could have been more proper, both to attach them to their Master, and to prove their own disinterestedness concerning worldly wealth.

works of mercy, benevolence, and tender compassion: such as feeding the hungry, healing every kind of sickness and disease, giving sight to the blind, and soundness to the lame, and restoring suspended animation, to comfort a disconsolate widow or the deeply afflicted parents of an only child: works which breathe the same spirit of benevolence and universal love as the religion whose divine authority they were intended to attest, and which hold forth to all the disciples of that religion a most striking lesson of duty, to exert, on all occasions, whatever faculties they are endowed with, for the same amiable purposes of charity and beneficence. And that this suitableness of the nature of the miracles to the spirit of our religion itself was not accidental, but intentional, our Lord himself teaches us, in the rebuke he gave to his disciples, when, provoked by the inhospitable affront put upon their Master by some Samaritans, they proposed his calling down miraculous destruction upon them, like one of the Jewish prophets, "Ye know not," says he, "what manner of spirit ye are of. For the "son of man is not come to destroy men's "lives, but to save them." And also by delegating to his apostles and the seventy dis-

ciples, power to be exerted only in the same benevolent acts.

III. In reviewing the predictions contained in the evangelical history of Luke, the two first which present themselves, are in the concise account given us, in the third, or, as I reckon it, in the first chapter, of the preaching of John the Baptist. When John asks the people, *who had warned them to flee from the wrath about to come* upon them? and teaches them the only way to avoid it; and adds, *even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees;* he plainly intimates that the divine vengeance, denounced upon that nation by their own prophets, was fast approaching, and would actually come upon that depraved generation. A prophetic admonition of an event which it was not in the power of any man to foresee by his own sagacity; but which we know was fully and fatally accomplished, within little more than forty years afterwards, by the intire destruction of Jerusalem, and extirpation of the Jews from their own country. The second is a prediction of the Baptist respecting the true Messiah, whom he declares himself not to be, but says

that *he is coming;* and instead of baptizing his disciples with water, like himself, should *baptize them with the holy inspiration and with fire.* This very prediction is repeated by Jesus Christ himself to his disciples, after his resurrection;* and, by its literal completion a few days afterwards, on the memorable day of Pentecost, afforded the Apostles and first followers of our Lord a most convincing, double proof of the truth and divine authority of the mission, both of their Master and the Baptist John.

In the fifth chapter, verse 35, we find our Saviour, in the answer he gives to the question of the Scribes and Pharisees, why his disciples never fasted? which those of John and of the Pharisees did frequently, foretelling, that he *the Bridegroom,* adopting the same parabolical denomination by which he is sometimes spoken of, both in the preceding predictions of the Jewish prophets, and in the subsequent Christian prophecy of the Revelation, should *be taken away from them;* and that, during that separation, his disciples indeed *should fast;* that is, should really be in a state of humiliation, suffering, and affliction. That

* Acts i. 5.

this is our Lord's true meaning, and not that his disciples would adopt days of voluntary fasting and humiliation, as a religious observance like the Pharisees, is evident from the parable which he subjoins immediately to this answer, by which he teaches the Jews, that for him to graft his spiritual religion upon the carnal ordinances of the Mosaic ritual, would be as improper and as absurd as for a man who had purchased a new garment, instead of wearing it and laying aside his old one, to repair and patch his old garment with pieces cut out of the new; which could only spoil the new, and make a ridiculous motley of the old: And though it was no more wonderful, that they should prefer the rites and ceremonies of their Law to the simple purity of his Gospel, than that men, whose palates had been long habituated to old wine, should not immediately relish new, though perhaps of a superior quality, which they had never tasted before; yet the old ordinances and observances of their Law were as ill suited to the spirit of the religion he preached, as old, decayed, leathern bottles were, to contain new wine whose fermentation was not yet over. That fasting, in its strictest sense, made a part

of the afflictions endured by his Apostles and earliest disciples, appears from Paul's enumeration of the sufferings he had endured for the Gospel's sake,* where he recounts his being *in hunger and thirst, in fastings often;* and therefore our Lord, by a very common figure of speech, putting a part for the whole, answers the question as if he had said, "Fasting is a state of grief, affliction, and humiliation; and whilst I, the delegate of heaven, who announce to them the joyful tidings of the New Covenant, remain with them, such a state were as improper and as unnatural for them, as it would be for the attendants of the bridegroom at a marriage feast: but the time approaches, when I shall be removed from them, and during my absence, it will be their lot to be amply grieved, humbled, and afflicted." To the same purport many other prophetic admonitions, contained in this history, in the Acts and in the Apocalypse, repeatedly assert the constant state of affliction and persecution, in which the faithful, conscientious disciples of Jesus Christ would continue, from his ascension to the period of his appearing again to mankind, in

* 2 Cor. xi. 27.

the prophetic character of the lamb-like bridegroom, when the true christian church, *his wife*,* shall have *made herself ready*.

It is the more necessary to point out to public notice the real meaning of this prediction, because, whilst the well-known, too literal completion must convince us of the divine authority of the prophet, the very recording this and similar prophecies, of the same import, by the Apostles and first Disciples of Jesus Christ, affords the most striking and satisfactory proof that can be conceived, of their own disinterested sincerity in embracing and preaching to the world the religion of the Gospel: for, the spirit of prophecy being expressly declared to be *the testimony of Jesus*, and of every authentic messenger of heaven, the truth of their master's mission, and even their own veracity, depended upon the accomplishment of these predictions in their own persons, and those of their fellow christians. From their writings it appears, that they were well aware of this; and accordingly expected, and were prepared, as the certain consequence of the religious profession they embraced, and to which they zealously invited others, not only to abandon all hopes of tem-

* Apoc. xix. 7.

poral emolument and prosperity, but also to undergo the contempt and hatred of the rest of the world, and all the most injurious or painful inflictions of unrelenting persecution. Unless, therefore, we suppose them to have been the grossest fools and madmen, which no person, who enjoys his own senses, and has read the genuine writings of Luke and Paul, can suppose, it is absolutely impossible that any thing less than the most satisfactory conviction of the actual resurrection of their illustrious Master to an immortal life, and the firmest confidence that, their present life ended, they, like him, should be amply recompensed for all their sufferings for the Gospel's sake, could have induced them to profess, much less to propagate, the religion of Jesus Christ.

The orthodox church, indeed, established by the Emperor Constantine, hath experienced none of these prophetic marks of the true disciples of Christ. She very early placed herself under the protection, and prostituted herself to the will, of the Princes of the present world; and, instead of suffering humiliation or afflictions of any kind, by her influence over them, she hath amply shared the authority of her royal paramours, and even

wantoned in the continual enjoyment of temporal honours, opulence, and power. But though, for this, amongst many other reasons, she herself cannot be justly allowed the title of the true Church of Christ,* yet, from the first moment of her establishment to the present hour, she hath been the chief means of accomplishing these prophecies upon the conscientious disciples of Jesus and his apostles, by the confiscation of their property, the imprisonment and punishment of their bodies, the deprivation, in numberless cases, of their lives, and, in all, of their natural rights, as men and denizens of their native countries. And it must be matter of no small consolation to those faithful Christians, who are able to *discern the signs of the times*, that the predicted period of her presumptuous, cruel triumph, and of their own state of degradation and oppression, hastens fast to its conclusion.

In the ninth chapter, verse 21, &c. Luke informs us, that our Lord checked his disci-

* It is obvious that, by parity of reason, her elder Sister, the Church of Arius, is also barred of all claim to the same title; for though the contest ended at last in favour of the orthodox Church, they were long rivals in the affections of the same worldly potentates, and, during several reigns, enjoyed alternately the same imperial protection, the same honours and emoluments, and displayed the very same spirit of intolerant persecution.

ples, for calling him *the Christ of God;* that is, the predicted anointed King of the Jews; and forbad them to call him so to any man; telling them (without doubt, both to remove from their minds all expectation of present emolument to themselves, from the idea, so prevalent amongst the Jews, that the promised Messiah was to reign over them in all the worldly pomp and splendour of a temporal prince; and to prevent their furnishing the Rulers of the Jews, with the very pretence they sought for, of accusing him to the Romans, as one who proclaimed himself their King;) that before he, whose only character at present was that of *the Son of Man*, or an human prophet, could appear in the glorious character of *the Christ*, or anointed sovereign of the Jews, promised by their prophets, he "must suffer much, be rejected of the elders, "chief priests, and scribes," as it is repeated in the 44th verse of this chapter, and still more circumstantially, c. xviii. 31—34—"be "delivered into the hands of men, of the "Gentiles, and be slain, and rise again the "third day." Nay, he even described unto them, the particular mode of his suffering death, by adding, that if they were resolved to be his followers, they must learn self-de-

nial, and imitate him, by being daily prepared to undergo the death of the cross. To these clear and explicit prophecies of his own death and resurrection, the vision of angels, recorded in the 24th chapter, referred the women, who came to embalm his body on the third day after his death; and though, being prophecies penned by the historian after the event, they afford *us* no satisfactory evidence in themselves, yet to his disciples, who well recollected the words of these predictions, though they did not, at the time, comprehend their meaning, and who then saw them so literally and wonderfully accomplished, they must have afforded the most convincing as well as astonishing proof of the divine authority of their master's mission, that can be imagined.

In the conclusion of the same discourse with his disciples, in which he assures them, that after being put to death he should appear in the glorious character of the predicted Christ, or King, and be invested with heavenly power and authority, he adds, "I tell you of "a truth, there be some standing here which "shall not taste of death till they see the "kingdom of God." In order to understand our Lord's meaning in this prediction, that

the kingdom of God would appear even before the death of some of those disciples to whom he was then speaking, it is necessary to observe, that though a different sense is sometimes given to these words in other scriptures, and consequently by commentators upon those scriptures, yet in the writings of Luke and Paul, and in the book of the Revelation, the phrase, *Kingdom of God, or of Christ*, is invariably used to signify only the state of the present world under the New Covenant of the Gospel, or the establishment of true Christianity amongst mankind. For this reason, when the Pharisees, with ideas of a very different kind, of earthly kingdom, which they expected from the Messiah, asked our Saviour,* *when the kingdom of God should come?* he answered, that *the kingdom of God* would not be an object of external shew and observation, but the faithful, obedient subjection of the internal disposition and hearts of men to the will of God. "Ye shall not be able to point it out when it comes, saying, "lo, here! or, lo, there! for behold the king-"dom of God is *within you.*" But that, after his resurrection, he was actually invested with the heavenly glory and power, of the pre-

* Luke xvii. 20.

dicted *Son of God, the Christ*, or *Messiah*, promised to the Jews, was manifested to the eleven apostles and all his other disciples, in his miraculous ascension from off the earth; in the prophetic revelation of the future state of his Church, to his apostle John; in his glorious personal appearances, many times vouchsafed to his twelfth, posthumous, apostle Paul; and more extensively in the display of those supernatural powers, with which he endowed the first preachers of his Gospel to the world. And with respect to the establishment of the religion of the New Covenant amongst mankind, there are but two ways of its being effected, suggested to us, in the sacred scripture. One of these is the conviction and conversion of the different nations of the world, to the rational religion of the Gospel, by the preaching to them that word of God, attested to the first ages by the supernatural evidence of miraculous acts, as well as by completed predictions, and to all succeeding generations, by the continually increasing weight of evidence arising from a long series of prophecies; which predication of the truths of the Gospel, in the figurative language of the Apocalypse, is called* *a sharp*

* Apoc. xix. 15.

sword proceeding *out of the mouth* of Christ, a weapon that we are assured will, at length, prove invincible, and entirely extirpate superstitious error, deceit and falsehood, howsoever powerfully supported: the other, by the signal, providential destruction of those earthly powers which oppose, and endeavour to suppress, its progress. By the first of these means, most of the Apostles and first preachers of Christianity saw *the kingdom of God* take place, in a very considerable degree, before their death, in the conversion of great numbers, not of Jews only, but of Pagans, both in Asia and Europe; and by a very memorable and signal instance of the second, in the predicted destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem, the desolation of the country of Judea, and the entire dispersion of the whole nation of the Jews, those first malignant opposers of the Gospel, and persecutors of the followers of Christ, (an event, which, as it took place within forty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, some of his disciples must have lived to see,) the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic religion, were rendered absolutely impracticable for the time to come; the Old Covenant made with that people by the mediation of Moses, cancelled and abolished;

and no other left subsisting between the Deity, and any of his creatures, except the New Covenant of *the kingdom of God*, proposed to all mankind in the Gospel.

In the eleventh chapter, verse 29, &c. and again in the conclusion of the same chapter, our Saviour, like the Baptist, expressly limits the predicted destruction of Jerusalem, and the calamities that were coming upon that nation, in consequence of their impenitence, and obstinate, inhuman rejection of him, their last and greatest prophet, to that generation to which he was then speaking; and in verse 29 and 30, specifies the precise number of years that were to intervene between his preaching to them and that dreadful catastrophe. "This evil generation," says he, "seeketh a sign; and there shall be no sign "given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, "so shall the Son of Man be to this genera-"tion." The writer usually called Matthew, without the least reason or propriety, makes this similitude, between Jonas and our Saviour, to consist in the time that the former was in the whale's belly, and the latter in the grave; but if the fabulous interpolation of the two first chapters of the Book of Jo-

nah, (to which Mendelsohn,* the late learned Jew of Berlin, assures us no reasonable Jew ever pays the least regard) could be true; yet whosoever compares the geographical situation of Nineveh, with respect to the Mediterranean sea, will be convinced that nothing transacted upon that sea could fall under the notice of the inhabitants of Nineveh, nor, consequently, be any sign to them at all. The only sign that Jonas was to the Ninevites, was his being a prophet, commissioned by God, to preach to them repentance and righteousness; to upbraid them with their vicious immoralities; and to denounce, if their wickedness was continued, the destruction of their city, within *forty days*, that is, (according to the uniform meaning of that expression in prophetic language) *forty years*, from the time of his preaching. Such a preacher of repentance and righteousness, only in a much superior and more distinguished character, was Jesus Christ, to the nation of the Jews; he repeatedly assured them, that "except "they repented, like those Galileans, whose "blood Pilate had mingled with their sacri-"fices, and those upon whom the tower of

* See the Letter prefixed to his Dialogue on the Immortality of the Soul.

"Siloam fell and slew them, they should all "likewise perish;" and by this similitude between the denunciation of Jonah and his own, he plainly declares, that the destruction of Jerusalem would be accomplished within forty years after his death; for that they would not hearken to his preaching, and repent, as the men of Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonas, and that, therefore, the destruction of their city would not be postponed beyond the then existing generation, like that of Nineveh, and that, in the judgment which was so soon coming upon them, they would stand condemned by the striking contrast between the behaviour of the people of Nineveh and their own. Agreeably to this prophetic denunciation of our Saviour, from his crucifixion, that is, from the seventeenth of the emperor Tiberius, to the final destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, by Titus, in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, is a period of exactly forty years.*

* Luke informs us, that the ministry of John the Baptist began in the fifteenth year of Tiberius; and as the Jewish year commenced only fourteen days before the Passover, at which time it was the duty, both of John himself, and the nation of the Jews, in general, to be engaged at Jerusalem in the celebration of that feast, it is next to certain, that he did not begin to preach and baptise, till after the feast of the Passover of that year. If any time at all, therefore, be allowed for the ministry of John, before Jesus began to preach the new covenant

The thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, verse 18—21, contains two prophetic similitudes of the kingdom of God, that is of the state of true Christianity in the world, which are plain predictions, that the religion of the Gospel, of however small extent and influence at the beginning, will in time become sufficiently extensive to afford refuge and consolation, to the various nations of the earth; and that though its influence may be slow, and for some time scarcely per-

of the kingdom of God, the harvest, previous to which our Lord's disciples rubbed the ears of corn for food, must have been the harvest of the sixteenth year of that emperor; and his public ministry, which preceded that circumstance but a short time, must have begun soon after the Passover of that year, and after Herod had imprisoned John, through a jealous fear of his popularity. Consequently, the succeeding Passover, at which, Luke tells, our Saviour was crucified, was in the seventeenth year of the reign of Tiberius. Now Tiberius reigned twenty-two years and almost seven months, and died March 16th; so that from the Crucifixion to the Passover, which followed the death of

	Y.	M.	D.
Tiberius, was just	6	0	0
Caligula reigned	3	10	8
Claudius	13	8	20
Nero	13	8	0
Galba	0	7	13
Otho	0	3	4
Vitellius, about	0	8	0
	38	9	15

So that from our Lord's death to the first Passover after Vespasian was made Emperor, was thirty-nine years; and consequently to the same festival, in the second year of his reign, when his son Titus laid the fatal siege to that devoted city, was exactly forty years.

ceived, yet it will assuredly at length, spread itself over the whole globe. These prophecies still remain to be completed, and therefore, at present afford no satisfactory evidence of the truth and divine authority of the Gospel. They naturally suggest, however, some very important reflections to the observing mind, which is desirous to distinguish truth from error, and to avoid embracing the latter for the former.

It is natural for many sorts of seeds, which, at length, rise to the size of extensive trees, to lie long in the ground, before their vegetation is perceptible, and to increase very slowly for a considerable length of time; a very small quantity of leaven also, inclosed within a great bulk of meal, must necessarily operate very slowly, and require a long time before much effect from it can be discerned, and a cold, unfavourable season would naturally restrain the vegetation in the one case, and check the fermentation in the other; yet in process of time both might be completely perfected: but when a seed is once grown to the dimensions of a large tree, it is contrary to the whole course of nature for it to *decrease*; and dough once leavened cannot become unleavened. We may, therefore, pro-

nounce with certainty, upon the credit of these prophetic similitudes, that, notwithstanding its being called, and professing to be, Christian, the religion which spread so rapidly in the second and third centuries, which, in the fourth century was established, by the authority of the Roman emperors, under the title of the orthodox and holy catholic church, and which, for some ages, prevailed exclusively in every country in Europe, and in a very large part of Asia and Africa, was not the church of Christ, nor the religion of his Gospel. For, besides that it did not make its progress in the slow, gradual manner here described, in the seventh century, upon the rise of the Mahomedan superstition, it soon *decreased*, and became diminished in its extent, and continued gradually losing ground, till at length, it was supplanted by it out of all Asia, Africa, and a considerable part of Europe, that is, particularly out of all those regions of the world, where it originated, and was first established; and the fabulous religion of the pretended Arabian prophet, at this day, occupies a much larger extent of the earth, than ever was occupied by the religion of the orthodox church, in its most flourishing condition. As the members of

that church make a merit of foregoing the use of their reason, in questions concerning their religion, it is no wonder that difficulties like these, affect them not with the slightest impression, though they acknowledge that the constant over-ruling providence of God restrains or promotes every important change in the affairs of men: but a disinterested, unprejudiced observer will easily discern sufficient reason for God's so conspicuously declaring his preference of the Mahomedan to the orthodox superstition. If we compare them only in two striking features, the one respecting the Deity himself, the other as influencing the morals of mankind, we shall find that Mahomedanism, by teaching the undivided uncompounded unity of almighty God, gives its professors a just and rational idea of the purely spiritual, incorporeal nature of the author of their existence, and the only proper object of their adoration; and, as it prohibits and prevents idolatry of every kind, it so far coincides with the first great purpose and design of all revealed religion, and must so far, therefore, meet with the approbation of the immutable God of truth; whilst the orthodox church, on the contrary, represents God as of a compounded nature,

so monstrous and irrational, that she herself declares her own definition of him to be unintelligible, though it must be believed; and by addressing distinct and separate worship to each of the three different agents, that compose her triform Deity, and to one of them as incarnate in an human body like our own, she directly contradicts the voice of the Almighty, concerning himself, and establishes, as a religious duty, every species of idolatry forbidden by divine Revelation. The Koran also, by the single prohibition of the use of strong drink, whilst it effectually enforces on its disciples a rigid observance of the Gospel precepts of continual temperance, by constantly preserving the temperament of their bodies cool and undisturbed, and their rational faculties clear and unclouded, cannot fail of having a powerful influence, highly favourable to their bodily health, and the moral virtue of their minds;* whereas, in Christendom, the constant, copious use, and very frequent intemperate and excessive

* I was, many years ago, assured by an intimate friend, an intelligent, worthy man, who had traded largely, both in the northern parts of Africa, and in many different countries of Europe, that he was never once deceived in confiding in the honour and integrity of a Mahomedan; but that, through the perfidy and dishonesty of some of those he dealt with, he had been defrauded and injured in every nation of professed Christians.

abuse, of fermented liquors, has effects fatally pernicious both to the bodily health and morals of its inhabitants.

It is true, the orthodox church preaches the pure ethics of the Gospel, and the virtue of temperance amongst the rest; but she has, at the same time, ingeniously and impiously, contrived to render her own, and what is still worse, all the preaching of the Gospel, of none effect, by her doctrine of the death of Jesus, considered as a propitiatory sacrifice of infinite efficacy, and an universal atonement for sin. Even the protestant subdivisions of that church, in their most sacred and solemn acts of devotion, as well as in the sermons of their preachers, declare that, by his death, *a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction*, hath been made to the divine justice, *for the sins of the whole world*. Gracious God, have mercy upon the presumptuous folly and madness of thy erring creatures!—By this single doctrine, she has erected an universal asylum, as far as another life is concerned, not for intemperance alone, but for every other vice and crime, of which human nature is capable. The miserable, quibbling supplement to this shocking doctrine, that repentance and a proper faith is necessary,

for the particular application of the benefits of this atonement, can be of no avail; for no sinner can believe that a *just* Being will inflict any punishment on account of offences for which he has already actually received *perfect and sufficient satisfaction*: and, besides, since the people are also taught, that a sinner may effectually recur to this saving faith and repentance, even on his death-bed, or in the condemned dungeon of Newgate, what religious motive can any man have to curb and restrain his natural passions or inclinations, so long as he hath it in his power to gratify them, at any rate, when he knows, that to the last moment of his life, he can hope to screen himself against the deserved consequence of his wickedness, by taking refuge at the cross of Christ? If any reflecting person can doubt of the dreadfully pernicious influence, which such a persuasion as this, must have upon the morals of the people in general,*

* I say, in general, because, so congenial is moral virtue to our uncorrupted nature, that the world hath, at all times, produced exemplary, virtuous individuals, even amidst the grossest abuses of superstition of every kind. Without doubt there are, and always have been, many good and amiable characters amongst the members of the orthodox Church, in spite of the naturally evil tendency of her doctrines; as Pagan Athens, even in the libertine and vicious age of Alcibiades and Aristophanes, could boast a Socrates and a Xenophon.

wheresoever it is embraced, let him, for a moment, consider what would be the certain effect, should the Legislature set up an asylum for murder, in every parish in the kingdom, to which, if the wilful murderer could flee before he was apprehended, he should be exempt from punishment. Society would soon experience the evil consequences of such a policy, in the centuple multiplication of instances, even of that crime the most shocking to human nature. And, to complete his conviction of the similar effects, which this doctrine has, and ever hath had, upon the morals of professed Christians, he needs only to review the moral history of Christendom, from the beginning of the fourth, and attend to the vicious immoralities every where continually practised by persons of all stations, within the sphere of his own observation, in this first decade of the nineteenth century of the Christian Æra.*

* To maintain a religious establishment, whose main object is the preaching up this pernicious asylum to the people, according to the estimate of the Lord Bishop of Landaff,* costs this country two millions sterling every year. But, on a supposition that the amount of all the landed estates in our own country, which may be justly deemed ecclesiastical, are equivalent to all the Lay impropriations or tithes in Lay hands, which, I persuade myself, cannot be far from the truth, it is easy to shew that the value of our ecclesiastical revenue,

* See his Charge to the Clergy, 1791.

In the answer which our Lord gives, verse 24—30, to the question, whether there were few that should be saved from the woes he

is above double what the learned and liberal minded Prelate takes it to be. For since, in the cases of new inclosures, the smallest proportion of land allotted to the Clergy, by the Legislature, in lieu of tythes, is one seventh, the value of the tithes of the whole kingdom must be equal to, at least, one seventh of the land. Now, from the calculations of Sir John Sinclair, and other the most able estimators, it appears, that the annual rental of the whole kingdom amounts to full sixty millions; but as houses, except in the city of London, are not subject to any kind of tithe, supposing the rental of all the rest of the houses to be equal to that of the land, the titheable property will then amount to thirty millions yearly, the seventh part of which is rather more than four millions and a quarter. A sum which, whenever the time arrives when our Rulers, thinking it right to prove themselves the impartially equitable, common parents of the whole national family, by favouring the tenets and opinions of no one sect or party above the rest, instead of vainly attempting to controul and regulate the minds of their subjects, in matters concerning only God, and their own consciences, shall content themselves with restraining and regulating their overt actions and civil conduct, by the vigorous and equal execution of wise and wholesome laws, and leave every man, like the various sects of dissenters of the present day, to chuse his own mode of worshipping the Deity, and remunerating his own religious instructor, will be sufficient, by selling the tithes to the several proprietors of land, at only twenty-five years' purchase, and the estates to the highest bidder, greatly to reduce the present immense national debt, and thereby exonerate the people of between three and four millions of taxes. In the fortunate, affluent circumstances of this nation, should Administration have wisdom, and equity, and true christian piety enough, to adopt such a plan of religious reformation, without waiting till it is forced upon them, by the tumultuous, violent paroxysm of some convulsion of the state, it might be quietly effected, in the course of a few years, without the smallest injury to any one individual, by a gradual abolition of the present ecclesiastical establishment, and a proportional diminution of the public burthens, on the voidance of every benefice, either by the death or voluntary resignation of the several incumbents.

denounced against the faithless and disobedient, by being admitted members of the kingdom of God, that is of the society of true and faithful Christians? he advises his hearers to endeavour to enter into that kingdom through the lowly, narrow entrance of the persecutions, difficulties, and discouragements which awaited them, for that great numbers would seek to obtain the name of Christians by very different means, but that though they should call themselves his disciples, and plead that his Gospel had been preached amongst them, he would reject them as strangers to his religion, because they had been *workers of iniquity*: yet that the members of his Church and faithful subjects of God's earthly kingdom should be composed of people of the different nations from every quarter of the globe. And, in the 28th verse, he seems to predict, that at the prophetic period, denominated Christ's coming, to destroy the opposers of his Gospel and to establish his promised kingdom over the earth, not only those faithful Christians who have suffered persecutions and violent deaths, for his sake, shall miraculously be restored to life again before the rest of the dead, as the prophets Paul and John assure us, but that the

three great Patriarchs also, and all the distinguished Jewish prophets, will partake of the same happy, glorious pre-eminence. To this honourable, happy event the Angel seems also to allude, when, at the close of the prophetic visions vouchsafed to Daniel, he says to the Prophet, "But go thou thy way till the end be: "for thou *shalt rest*, and *stand in thy lot* at the "end of the days." But the force of the testimony of these, like that of all other unaccomplished prophecies, cannot be felt before the time of their actual completion shall arrive.

In the conclusion of this thirteenth chapter, our blessed Saviour, replying to some who advised him to depart out of Galilee for fear of Herod, assures them, that he should securely continue working miracles in that district for three days longer, for that his death could be accomplished only at Jerusalem; and apostrophizing the inhabitants of that metropolis, in a pathetic commiseration of the desolation so soon to come upon them in consequence of their obstinate incredulity and rejection of his mission, he adds, that, nevertheless, they should not see him till they should say, *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* When he predicted this circumstance, he was at a considerable dis-

tance from Jerusalem, attended only by the Apostles and a few other disciples who followed him from Galilee; but as he approached the metropolis, we may easily conceive what crowds of its inhabitants the fame of such an extraordinary prophet would draw forth, to see him and his wonderful works, and to hear his instructions; and upon his entry into the city, Luke informs us*, that this whole multitude burst forth into a spontaneous completion of this prediction, exclaiming, *Blessed is the king that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven and glory in the highest.* To those who had heard his words in Galilee, this event must have afforded a convincing proof of the divine gift of prophecy with which their master was endowed from heaven: but since this history was penned, long after that event had come to pass, it can, in itself, be of no important use to *us*, except to shew that the Apostles and first disciples of Jesus Christ, having received proofs of his heavenly mission, by means of completed prophecy as well as miracles, had every requisite and possible means of being fully and rationally convinced of the truth and divine authority of that Gospel, which they preached after his

* Chap. xix. 38.

death, and for which they willingly sacrificed all their interests in the present world.

V. We have seen that in the 11th chapter, our Lord predicted that the total destruction of Jerusalem would happen within forty years from his preaching the Gospel to the Jews; and in the 17th chapter, from verse 22 to the end, he foretells, that its destruction, which is here described as one instance of his coming with power to establish his promised kingdom, by the signal, providential extirpation of the first inveterate enemies and opposers of his religion should be sudden and unexpected, like the flash of lightning that frequently begins a widely destroying storm; and when the people should as little think of the fatal danger impending over them, as the men of Noah's age thought of being overwhelmed by the deluge, or the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, of perishing by sulphureous showers of fire. Accordingly, Josephus informs us, that such a calamity was so little expected at the time when it befel them, that Jerusalem was then filled with multitudes who were come from every quarter to celebrate the Passover; and that Titus himself, far from intending to destroy

the city, much less with the shocking circumstances with which the siege was attended, took every measure in his power to prevent it, till impelled to it by the irritating, wicked conduct of that miserable, devoted people. In the last verse of this chapter, to the question, where is this unexpected slaughter and devastation to happen? our Lord replies; *where the* great *carcase* of the nation, their metropolis, *is, there will the eagles,* a phrase peculiarly expressive of the Roman armies, *be gathered together* to its destruction. That this prediction, respecting the actual destroyers of the city of Jerusalem, within so short a space as forty years, was literally accomplished, we all know, and many of those who heard it uttered, must have lived to see: but according to all appearances, at the time when it was given, nothing could be more improbable. Judea was already a Roman province, and the Jews, in peaceable submission to the mild yoke of their conquerors, enjoyed tranquillity and prosperity; and their chief magistrates were upon so good terms with the Roman Governors, that, to comply with their earnest solicitations, after having in vain repeatedly endeavoured to dissuade them from their request, Pilate sacrificed, not

only the common feelings of humanity, but all sense of the honour and justice of a ruler, by ordering a man to be crucified, whom he himself declared to be without fault: and one of his successors, above twenty-five years afterwards, even in the moment of quitting his government, for the very same purpose of *doing the Jews a pleasure*, left Paul in bonds and imprisonment, though fully satisfied of his innocence. When, therefore, we consider, that it was the great body of the Jewish nation assembled at Jerusalem, to keep the festival of the Passover, who, having accused him to the Roman power, as one who endeavoured to excite a rebellion against Cæsar, rejoiced in having unjustly accomplished the ignominious, cruel death of the meek and innocent Jesus, the messenger of heaven, and the mediator of that new covenant, which God, by Moses and the old prophets, had assured their fathers he would make with their posterity; and that it was at the very same national assembly forty years afterwards, that they themselves, on account of their own atrociously criminal, infatuated conduct, and being in actual rebellion against Cæsar, began to suffer every possible destructive cruelty of a siege, in the end of which, Jerusalem was razed and

levelled with the ground, by that very Roman power; not only the completion of a prophecy, which, at the time of its prediction, seemed so unlikely to come to pass, but so signal an instance of retributive justice, in the course of the divine providence over the affairs of men, must surely strike every rational mind with the most awful and important reflections.

In the beginning of the 18th chapter, which is a continuation of the conversation we have just been considering, a parable is introduced, by way of instructing his disciples that they should never fail to offer up their daily prayers to almighty God: and the inference deduced from it is in these words: "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And "shall not God avenge his own chosen *ser-* "*vants*, who cry day and night unto him, "though he bear long with them? I tell you "that he will avenge them speedily," or rather suddenly. The sudden and hasty destruction of the Jewish nation, just mentioned above, was one memorable instance of God's severely avenging the unmerited sufferings and cruel persecution of Jesus himself, and his apostles and first faithful followers, after bearing with them for forty years; and is an

earnest of the full completion of the divine vengeance, according to this and many other predictions, upon the enemies of his Gospel, and the persecutors of his conscientious disciples, at that now not very distant period, which the scriptures denominate *his coming*.

This prophetic assurance is immediately followed by an affecting, tender exclamation, recorded only by Luke, but of a nature equally prophetic, and so peculiarly expressive of the present state of true and rational Christianity in the world, that it affords a most convincing testimony, both of the divine authority of the prophet, and the correct fidelity of the historian. "Nevertheless," exclaims our blessed Lord, "when the son of "man cometh, shall he find faith on the "earth?" The extreme paucity of his faithful disciples to be found in the world at that great predicted æra, so clearly foretold in this pathetic ejaculation, is very strongly marked also in the Apocalypse, by the expression, "my *two* witnesses,"* that is, a number only just sufficient to bear legal and credible testimony to the truth of his Gospel; for under the law of Moses, the regulation ordained by God himself, was, "at the mouth of two or

* Apoc. xi. 3.

"three witnesses, shall every matter be estab-
"lished."* If indeed those professed Christians, the members of the orthodox imperial church of Constantine, have really adopted the true Christian Faith, our Lord, *when he cometh*, can have no difficulty in finding what he so feelingly prelaments the want of. He may find it tolerated by the Mahomedans in Asiatic and European Turkey, and reigning triumphantly under the protection of the civil powers in all the rest of Europe, from Lapland to Gibraltar, and from Muscovy to the Azores; he may find it in Africa, America, and in the Indies of the East; and the *witnesses* in favour of the *orthodox Faith*, appear upon the earth, not by twos and threes, but by millions; so that, on this supposition, there is not the least foundation for our Saviour's sorrowful foreboding; and, as far as predictions of the scarcity of his faithful disciples are concerned, he must be pronounced a false prophet: but the truth is, the religion of that imperial church is so far from being the faith of his Gospel, that it is diametrically opposite to it; and when we deduct in our investigation Jews, Pagans, Mahomedans, the members of the orthodox church, and all

* Deut. xix. 15.

those speculative, reflecting minds, whom the gross absurdities and contradictions, which that church represents to them as the doctrines of Revelation, have driven to the entire rejection of all revealed religion as fabulous and false, well indeed may we adopt the words of our Lord's pathetic ejaculation, and exclaim, "where shall we find Faith on "the earth?"!!

The parable of the ten pounds, recorded in the succeeding chapter, is said to have been delivered expressly to teach his disciples, (who, notwithstanding his having repeatedly foretold them of his death, with all the particular circumstances attending it, still persuaded themselves that he would immediately assume the sovereignty of the predicted kingdom of God) that he must first go into a region far from the limits of the earthly globe, to receive from the supreme Majesty of Heaven, the earthly kingdom promised him, and was not to take possession of it till his return; but that then he will cause all his enemies to be destroyed, who refuse to acknowledge his authority, and will reward those faithful servants, who, waiting patiently, in full confidence of his actually returning again, invested with supreme power and glory, have made

the best improvement they could of those moral instructions with which he hath furnished them.

When our Lord spoke that parable, he had passed through Jericho and was journeying towards Jerusalem; and when he came within view of the city, the historian informs us, he could not refrain from weeping over it, at the contemplation of those calamities, which, as a prophet, he foresaw, and so repeatedly denounced against it; saying, "if thou hadst "known, even thou, at least in this thy day, "the things which belong to thy peace! but "now they are hid from thine eyes. For the "days shall come upon thee, that thine ene-"mies shall cast a trench about thee, and "compass thee round and keep thee in on "every side, and shall lay thee even with the "ground, and thy children within thee: and "they shall not leave in thee, one stone upon "another: because thou knewest not the time "of thy visitation." In the 21st chapter, this last circumstance is again repeated: and both that and the entire circumvallation of Jerusalem, two things quite unusual with the Romans in their sieges, were literally accomplished by them, in the case of that unhappy city. Nay, the whole prediction of the de-

struction of Jerusalem, expressly limited to the experience of that generation of the Jews, as it is recorded by Luke, contains so many singular, extraordinary circumstances, preceding and attending that siege, not mentioned by Moses, nor any of the old prophets, though some shocking circumstances predicted by them, are (no doubt, for that very reason) omitted by our Saviour, which, whoever has read the history of that fatal period, knows to have exactly come to pass, that the Jews themselves have no way of eluding such an incontestable testimony of his divine mission, according to the criterion laid down for them by Moses, but by refusing to admit the authenticity of this evangelical history, saying, that no satisfactory proof is given them, that the history itself was not written, after the event had taken place: but that Luke's history was not so written, is evidenced by every circumstance, that can combine to prove the contrary.

From the age of the Apostles to the present time, professed Christians have received, and transmitted down, this history and the Acts of the Apostles, as written by Luke, an early convert to Christianity, and the friend and companion of Paul; and in the second of

these histories, we, accordingly, find the author describing the travels of Paul, as being himself a partaker of them, and speaking, casually, in so circumstantial a manner, of times, places, and persons, as is scarcely possible for any writer to do, who was not living at the time of the transactions which he records. This second history, relates the situation of the primitive Christian Church, as low as about the fourth year of the emperor Nero, and no lower; and as the author wrote both his histories, avowedly for the use and perfect information of a friend, amongst the converts to the religion of Jesus, if he had written his latter history, after the reign of that emperor, he must have mentioned many later occurrences; particularly the unmerited, cruel treatment of the Christians, at Rome, on account of that conflagration, of which, every body was convinced, Nero himself was the real incendiary. So little ground is there, therefore, to imagine that even the Acts was written, after the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, that there is not the least reason to believe, the author was living after those events; and, to suppose that book to have been written later than the fourth or fifth year of Nero, is to con-

clude directly contrary to every degree of rational probability: yet in that work, he refers his friend Theophilus, to his history of the public ministry of Jesus, which contains this wonderful prediction, as to a work already in his possession. But there appears, one particular purpose of that prophecy, which it would not only have been useless, but absurd, to have penned after the event; especially since the accomplishment of that purpose, is no where expressly recorded, and is discoverable only, by fair inference, from the very silence of the historians of that siege. I mean, that it was intended as a timely warning to our Lord's disciples, amongst the Jews, to preserve them from sharing in the dreadful evils, so soon to befall their country. To this end, the prediction, as far as it relates to circumstances, previous to the siege, is not expressed in the usual, figurative language of prophecy; but, in the plainest and most literal terms, they are warned against the pretended Messiahs, whom artful imposture or visionary enthusiasm should produce; are bidden not to be too much alarmed at those wars and commotions, which would, for some years, precede the final destruction he was predicting; but that, as soon as they should see Jerusalem

itself invested with armed forces, they should hasten to quit both the metropolis, and country of Judea; for that then, they might be certain the time was come, when the predicted vengeance would be inevitably inflicted on that people; and since no historian mentions any of the Jewish Christians, as involved in the cruel fate of that dreadful calamity, though Josephus repeatedly enumerates all the other sects, and parties, amongst them, at that critical time, we must conclude, that the Christians, of whom Luke informs us there had always been a considerable church, at Jerusalem from the resurrection of Jesus, to the reign of Nero, and which undoubtedly subsisted still later, profiting by these timely admonitions, and observing the prophetic tokens of their danger, by separating themselves from their nation, and native country in time, escaped the complicated distresses of the general ruin. That this deliverance of his disciples, was one main purpose of the prophecy, is still more evident from the reflections which our Lord himself makes upon it, as a matter of consolation to them, under the previous persecutions they were to suffer, from their Jewish brethren, described v. 11—19, assuring them, that when the tokens he has described, began

to come to pass, they might then take comfort and courage; for that their redemption, that is, their deliverance from their most rancorous and inveterate enemies, drew nigh, and that, as they could judge, by the natural progress of vegetation, when summer was nigh at hand; so likewise, when they should see these things come to pass, they might be certain, that the establishment of the new covenant of the kingdom of God amongst men, would very soon commence, in the signal destruction of its first great opposers, and the consequent entire abolition, of the old covenant of Moses.

But there remains unnoticed another circumstance of this prophecy, which could not be written after the event, because it is at this day fulfilling, and as surely as it is the dictates of divine truth, will continue to be so for some time longer. "Jerusalem," says the prophet, "shall be trodden down of the "Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be "fulfilled." The meaning of this last expression no Jew can be at a loss to understand; he knows that it always signifies, till the measure of their iniquities is full, according to the ordinary course of God's providential forbearance with mankind. Thus the

times of the Canaanites were not fulfilled till 400 years after God had promised Abraham, that he would give their land to be an inheritance to his posterity; the times of the Jews themselves were fulfilled 40 years after their crucifixion of Jesus Christ: and, according to the prophecies of the Gospel, the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled 1260 years after the perfect establishment of the fabulous and blasphemous superstition, ordained by the Emperor Constantine, in those European states, which compose what once was the body of the Roman Empire. That Jerusalem hath hitherto continued in the state here described for full seventeen centuries, every Jew can testify, who must so far bear testimony, even against his will, to the truth of this prediction; and there is not the least apparent probability, that its condition will be altered, till the world shall see that grand revolution in human affairs take place, at the period denominated, in all the Christian scriptures, the coming of Jesus Christ, and the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The parable of the vineyard and husbandmen also, in the twentieth chapter, is evidently prophetic of the same event, viz. that

in return for their fathers' cruel treatment of the old prophets, and for that death which he knew awaited himself at their hands, God would extirpate their nation from their native land, and give it up to be possessed by other people; teaching them that he was the object of the prophecy of David, contained in the 118th Psalm, and, though rejected by them, who ought to have been the willing builders, would be made the head corner stone of that new religious edifice, which the Almighty had decreed, should be erected amongst men; and adding, according to the constant tenor of his prophecies on the same subject, "whosoever shall fall on that stone "shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall "fall, it will grind him to powder," that is, will utterly destroy him.

The last prophecy of our blessed Saviour, recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, being, together with the history of its wonderful accomplishment, within ten days after the prediction, professedly written long after the event, can, of itself, afford no satisfactory evidence to *us* of his veracity, or divine authority, as a prophet; but to his disciples, who were the objects of it, it could not fail to yield the fullest conviction of the truth and hea-

venly origin of that new religion, they were commanded to preach to the world, at the same time, that it peculiarly qualified them for their commission; I mean the promise of their being baptised, according to the declaration of God, by his prophet the Baptist, with the holy inspiration and with fire; for so Luke himself explains it, in the first chapter of the Acts, where the transactions of Jesus, from his resurrection to his ascension, are related more particularly and at large. "Behold," says he, c. xxiv. v. 49, "I send the "promise of my father upon you: but tarry "ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with "power from on high."

The candid reader is intreated to observe, that, in the conversations between our Lord and his disciples, previous to this prophetic promise of the effusion of the holy inspiration, wherein Luke informs us he pointed out to them the completion of those predictions in the Old Testament, which related personally to himself and to the preaching the New Covenant of the Gospel, it is particularly insisted on, that its promulgation was destined to begin at Jerusalem; that, on the day of his resurrection, he manifested himself to Peter, at Jerusalem, and to the two disciples,

as they went to Emmaus; and that, on the subsequent evening, that is, according to the Jewish computation of time, on the beginning of the second day of the week, he appeared to all the eleven apostles, and the hundred other disciples who accompanied them, in the city of Jerusalem; that he continued to instruct and converse with them, in the same city and its neighbourhood, for forty days after his resurrection, and, immediately before his miraculous ascension, commanded them *to tarry in the city of Jerusalem* till they received the promised gift of supernatural inspiration; and that they accordingly did so, and continually frequented the temple, to offer their praises and thanksgivings to Almighty God, for all the wonders of which they had been witnesses. The apostles, therefore, never departed from Jerusalem, from the resurrection to the day of Pentecost.

VI. Let us then, after this brief review of the miracles and prophecies recorded in the evangelical history of Luke, consider what the whole combined weight of evidence, in favour of its genuine authenticity, amounts to, when cleared of those fabulous and groundless additions, which the converts

from Paganism, and the schools of the later Platonists, made to it in the beginning of the second century.

All the historical and other writings of professed christians, which are extant, agree, as is before observed, in attributing this Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, to a very early disciple, though not an apostle, named Luke. The writer himself informs us, that his name was Silas; that he was one of those *chief men among the brethren*, whom the Apostles and the Elders, with the whole church at Jerusalem, sent to acquaint the converted Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, with their decision respecting the only observances of the Jewish Law, that were judged necessary for them; that he himself was a prophet, a duly qualified teacher of the Gospel, and preached much to the people at Antioch, to exhort them to continue in the faith they had adopted; that when his co-delegate, Judas, returned to Jerusalem to the Apostles there, he chose to remain in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; that upon the separation which took place, in consequence of a dissension between these two, he was chosen by Paul to supply the place of Barnabas; and that from that time, to his being sent prisoner to Rome,

and during his residence in that imperial city, he continued Paul's constant adherent, friend and fellow-traveller.

That it was Silas, who wrote these two histories, appears thus. From the conclusion of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth chapter of the Acts, we find that when Paul left Antioch, no one but Silas accompanied him, as far as Derbe and Lystra; and that there they were joined by Timotheus, whom Paul chose also to travel with him; that they three went through Phrygia and Galatia, and came to Troas, where Paul, in a vision, was directed to go over into Macedonia: "and "after he had seen the vision," says the author, "immediately *we* endeavoured to go "into Macedonia, assuredly gathering, that "the Lord had called *us* to preach the Gos-"pel unto them." This is the first passage in which the writer speaks in his own person; and in the same person, he frequently expresses himself afterwards to the end of his history. Now, since it is evident from this part of the Acts, compared with 2 Cor. c. i. v. 19, and with the address of both the epistles to the Thessalonians, that Paul had no attendants when he first preached the Gospel in Macedonia and Greece, besides Silas or

Silvanus, of which last name Silas is merely an abbreviation, and Timotheus, one of those two must be professedly the writer of these histories. That it was not Timotheus, appears from Acts c. xx. v. 4 and 5, where the author enumerates Timotheus amongst those disciples who accompanied Paul, on his return into Asia, and adds, "these going before, "tarried for *us* at Troas." It is Silas or Silvanus alone, therefore, who professes himself to have been the author of both these important histories. And his manner of informing us that he was so, affords infinitely greater satisfaction respecting the truth of his information, than could be derived from any titular ascription of them to him, either by himself or others. And though this circumstance, at first, has the appearance of contradiction to the universal historic testimony, which attributes them to Luke, they really only confirm the veracity of each other; for Lucas, that is Luke, is exactly the same abbreviation of Lucanus, a name derived from *lucus*, a grove or wood, that Silas is of Silvanus from Sylva, a word of the same signification. Since, therefore, we find that amongst those Jewish Christians, particularly, who were most con-

versant amongst the Greeks and Romans, it was customary to change their original Hebrew names, without doubt, the more to familiarize themselves to those people, as Tabitha was exchanged for the Greek word Dorcas, and Saul for the Roman name Paulus; and as is still usual with the Jews in every country; it seems clear that the name of the author of these histories, which in the Hebrew most probably was some word of similar import, viz. belonging to a grove or wood, might be translated indifferently by the Roman names, Lucanus or Silvanus,* and though he was, at first, called Silas, yet upon the persecution raised by Nero, or some other prudential reason, it might be deemed right to vary it to Luke, for many circumstances concur to render it highly probable, that the Lucas whom Paul mentions to Timothy in his second Epistle, as the only person who remained with him, is the very same as Silas, both which names, if re-translated into the original Hebrew name, must be expressed by the same word. A very

* In the same manner, the Hebrew name Aaron, might have been familiarized to the Romans, by being rendered Collinus or Montanus; and an Englishman of the name of Wood, might domesticate his very name in France, by calling himself either Du Bois, or La Foret.

probable circumstance, which may well account for later writers calling him by that name.

It appears, then, upon the united testimony of the early Christian writers, and of the author himself, corroborated by that of the Apostle, with whom he was joined in the commission to preach the Gospel in Macedonia and Greece, that these two books were really written by Silas or Luke, who was so well qualified a witness of what he relates, that he was the approved friend and assistant of all the Apostles, from whom he could not fail to receive perfect information, of every fact and doctrine he has recorded, previous to his own conversion; and was so considerable a personage in the transactions he has related afterwards, that, in the words of the Roman Poet, he might justly have called himself a relater of events, *quæque ipse vidi, et quorum pars magna fui;* events whereof he had not only been an eye-witness, but in which he himself had been, for the most part, actively concerned.

On reviewing and comparing these two histories of Luke, we find the dates of all the important facts clearly and accurately ascertained; there appears in them a perfect har-

mony and consistency, not only with each other and with the epistles of Paul, but with all other historians, who have written of the same times.* The miracles recorded in them,

* Of how great importance it is to have the true Author of these histories ascertained, may be seen from the xii. Section of Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament. For, owing to his not having observed the satisfactory information given us by the Author himself, that these histories were written by the Silas mentioned in the second of them, as being himself an inspired Prophet, delegated by James and the rest of the Apostles resident at Jerusalem, the learned Professor is led to imagine, that the Author "was not a native of "Palestine, but, having accompanied St. Paul thither, made only a "short stay in Jerusalem, and spent the greatest part of his time in "Cesarea." And merely on the grounds of this misapprehension, though he allows him "to appear in all other respects to most ad-"vantage, when put in competition with the other writers of the "New Testament," except "in some particular facts which disagree, "either really or apparently, with the relations which have been "given by profane Historians." And tells us, that even admitting some errors, "he ceases not to be a most valuable Historian, espe-"cially in the Acts of the Apostles, where he speaks either as an "eye-witness himself, or instructed by St. Paul, the companion of "his journey." Yet lays a greater stress upon the difficulties supposed to be found in Luke's writings, than upon those which appear in all the rest, as being more irreconcilable to profane History. All these supposed difficulties, except one, exist in the Acts of the Apostles, which the learned Professor himself, as well as Dr. Lardner, has, in a masterly manner, shewn to be ungrounded; and that Luke's History is entitled to greater credit than that of Josephus, who chiefly contradicts him. So that the only irreconcilable difficulty is, that, "in the beginning of the Second Chapter of his Gospel, that Christ "was born during the taxation of Judea, when Quirinius was Go-"vernor of Syria, when it is certain, from the Roman historians, that "Quirinius was at that period in a different country." And as I have shewn, from the testimony of the Author himself, that Silas or Luke was not the Author of the two first Chapters of his Gospel, he must remain, according to the testimony of the learned Professor

breathe all the same compassionate, benevolent spirit, which is so peculiarly characteristic of the religion of Jesus Christ; and they contain the requisite evidence of sundry prophecies, some for the conviction of the first disciples, fulfilled within a few days or weeks after their prediction, others, at the interval of forty years, when the writer himself, in all probability, was not alive, and others extending to all ages, from the first promulgation of the Christian Covenant to the present time, and to a period yet to come. We have here, then, every kind of evidence, whereof the nature of the case admits, to convince us of the genuine authenticity and veracity of both these histories; and with these, for my own part, I am abundantly satisfied. Others, perhaps, submitting their judgments to early prepossessions, or to the decisions of the orthodox church, may persuade themselves, with that father of the Church, Theophylact, that God has given the world just four Gospels, neither more nor less, because there are just four cardinal virtues, four seasons of the year, four quarters of the world, north, east, south

himself, *a most valuable Historian*; and appear in all respects to superior advantage, when compared with the writers of the other Evangelical Histories.

and west; and because, as these Gospels are intended to be pillars to support the whole world, it is necessary there should be one for each of those four principal points of the compass: but these and all such ingenious, rhetorical arguments, have so little weight with me, that I profess myself better pleased with one evangelical history, satisfactorily authenticated, than with four thousand that should be found spurious, or even of doubtful and reasonably suspicious authority.*

* "It is very probable, that every one of the four Evangelists hath in his book the whole substance, all the necessary parts, of the Gospel of Christ. But for St. Luke, that he hath written such a perfect Gospel, in my judgment, it ought to be with them that believe him no manner of question. Consider, first the introduction to his Gospel, where he declares, what he intends to write, in these words: *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed amongst us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were Eye-witnesses, and Ministers of the Word, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things, from the very first, to write to thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.* Add to this place, the entrance to his *History of the Acts of the Apostles*: *The former Treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began, both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up.* Weigh well these two places, and then answer me freely and ingenuously to these demands: 1. Whether St. Luke doth not undertake the very same thing, which, he says, *many had taken in hand?* 2. Whether this were not *to set forth in order, a declaration of those things which were most surely believed amongst Christians?* 3. Whether the whole Gospel of Christ, and every necessary doctrine of it, were not surely believed among Christians? 4. Whether they, which were *Eye-witnesses and Ministers of the Word, from the beginning, delivered not the whole Gospel of Christ?*

From what Luke and other writers inform us, there is no doubt but the orthodox church, if she had chosen to preserve them, might at this hour have had forty instead of four different Gospels; and many of them much more deserving her regard, than three of those she hath thought fit to select and save from the general wreck, in which the writings of the primitive Christians have been involved: but, as far as the providence of Almighty God is concerned in preserving sufficient notice of the Evangelical Covenant, which he hath proposed to all mankind, I can see no more reason why there should be four distinct au-

5. Whether he doth not undertake to write in order these things, *whereof he had perfect understanding* from the first? 6. Whether he had not perfect understanding of the whole Gospel of Christ? 7. Whether he doth not undertake to write to Theophilus of all those things, *wherein he had been instructed*? 8. And whether he had not been instructed in all the necessary parts of the Gospel of Christ? 9. Whether, in the other text, *All things which Jesus began to do and teach*, must not at least imply, all the principal and necessary things? 10. Whether this be not the very interpretation of your *Rhenish* Doctors, in their annotation upon this place? 11. Whether all these Articles of the Christian Faith, without the belief whereof, no man can be saved, be not the principal and most necessary things which *Jesus* taught? 12, and lastly. Whether many things which St. Luke hath wrote in his Gospel, be not less principal, and less necessary, than all and every one of these? When you have well considered these proposals, I believe you will be very apt to think (if St. Luke be of credit with you) that all things necessary to salvation, are certainly contained in his writings alone."

CHILLINGWORTH, chap. iv. art. 43.

thentic histories of the very short period from the Baptism of John to the resurrection of Jesus, than that there should be four histories of the much longer, and equally important period, comprised in the Acts of the Apostles; or than the Jews should have had four different histories of the creation and their Patriarchs, and of the deliverance of their forefathers from the Egyptian bondage. However, since many great, learned and sagacious men have been in the habit of taking the authenticity of the other three for granted, they certainly ought not to be rejected as spurious, unless sufficient reason can be shewn for so doing. Having, therefore, in Luke's two histories, found a firm and solid basis for the genuine religion of Jesus securely to stand upon, I the more willingly and cheerfully proceed to examine the pretensions and merits of each of the other three Gospels, and to try them also by the same criterion: only remarking previously upon the Gospel according to Luke, that from the manner in which it is referred to in the introduction to the Acts, it appears not to have been written any great length of time before the latter history, which must have been composed after the fourth year of the reign of Ne-

ro, that is full thirty years after our Saviour's death and resurrection; and from the reason alleged in the short preface to what is called his Gospel, for writing it, we may conclude with certainty, that he knew of no such history then written by any of the Apostles themselves. For he tells Theophilus, (whether that be the real name of any particular friend, or only the common appellation of every sincere Christian) for whose use and information he intended both his works, that, because many had undertaken to publish an account of the great objects of their faith, as they had been taught them by the Apostles, and those who had been eye-witnesses of what they had related, he also having had perfect information from the beginning, had written to him an account of every thing, in order, that he might know the certainty of those things in which he had been instructed. Now had Matthew or any other Apostle, published a history of this kind, it would have entirely superseded the necessity of Luke's writing; and instead of a treatise of his own, he would undoubtedly have sent, or recommended to him, the narration of the Apostle: at least he could never have presumed to differ from that account, in either

the order or circumstances of the facts recorded, in the manner in which every attentive reader of the Gospels must know he does differ from the history attributed to Matthew. So that Luke's work itself very strongly implies, that Matthew had written no Gospel at all before the fourth year of Nero: for as he had resided several years with Matthew and the other Apostles at Jerusalem, and did not leave them till nineteen years after their Master's death, that is full ten years after the date usually allotted to Matthew's Gospel, he could not have been ignorant of such a publication, had it really existed at that time. It is true, some critics, on very insufficient grounds, postpone the Gospel of Matthew to a much later date; yet still they all agree that it was written before Luke's.

CHAPTER III.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

SECTION I.

IN observing critically the Gospel attributed to Matthew, the first circumstance to be remarked is, that the author himself gives not the slightest hint to suggest to us who he was, much less that he was an Apostle of Jesus Christ; so that the mere opinion of the fathers of the orthodox church of the second century, is all the foundation there is for its being called Matthew's, which, we have seen, is not the case with Luke's histories. The next is, that all those early writers, who inform us that Matthew wrote a Gospel, assure us he wrote it in Hebrew; and that our copy is a translation of it into Greek, by what hand is uncertain. The work itself, however, has by no means the appearance of an uniform translation from any language: for one can hardly suppose that any person

not duly skilled in the Greek language, would undertake to translate it; and whilst the greatest part of it is exceeding bad Greek, abounding with barbarous idioms, which is not to be accounted for, if the translator was properly qualified for the work, there are many passages, and several of them of considerable length, which are not only expressed in pure and elegant diction, but are nearly word for word the same as they stand in the Gospel according to Luke. This last circumstance is so obviously remarkable, both in this and the Gospel according to Mark, that to account for so improbable a fact, Grotius, Mills, and every candid critic, who has adopted the orthodox persuasion, that these Gospels were written in the same order in which the canon of the church hath placed them, have been forced to acknowledge that, it is evident, the writer of one must have transcribed from the other: and that, therefore, when Mark wrote his Gospel he must have had Matthew's before him, and Luke both the others. But it is absolutely impossible for me to suppose that Silas or Luke, who suffered so much, and so disinterestedly, to testify the truth of the Gospel, could profess to write accurately, and in order, an account

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of those acts and doctrines of Jesus, which were taught them by those who had been eye-witnesses of his ministry, and were his chosen Apostles; and yet, with the written account of an Apostle before his eyes, not only in many places invert the order of the narration, but differ greatly from him in the circumstances attending some of the most remarkable facts, and in others directly contradict him. Besides, in Luke, those verbally corresponding passages of the different Gospels are regular coherent parts of one uniform, well composed whole; whereas in Matthew they are quite incongruous to the rest of the language in which the book is written, and, like the ill-suited passages of those inconsistent poems condemned by Horace, *purpurei late splendent panni.* It must be observed also, that these two Gospels of Matthew and Mark abound in instances of Latin words, written in Greek letters; I do not mean proper names, nor even the names of coins, weights or measures, such as the Romans perhaps made use of, even in the most distant provinces, but military terms and words of common use in every language. Instead of the Greek words which Luke, Josephus, and, I believe, every other Greek writer

within the limits of the first century, use for Taxes or Tribute, Legion, Spearman, Watch or Guard, Centurion, to Scourge, and some others, they give us the names by which the Romans expressed them in their own language written in Greek characters: a circumstance which, though in itself not fully demonstrative of the age in which they were really written, when corroborated by other evidence of their spuriousness, is of considerable weight to convince us, that these two Gospels cannot be older than nearly the middle of the second century: and, therefore, the writer called Matthew might very probably see and transcribe from the Gospel according to Luke, and the pretended Mark from both. Let us examine each Gospel in its turn.

II. The two first chapters of Matthew contain so many wonderful circumstances, repugnant both to the other scriptures and to common sense, and so entirely unsupported by any other history, sacred or profane, that many persons, both of the present and former ages, have rejected them as a forgery, added by some other writer to the work of Matthew, (as, I persuade myself, I have demonstrated to have been the case with Luke's Gospel)

and that this book also originally began at the third chapter, with the Baptism of John; though there is no proper beginning of a history at that chapter, as there evidently is in Luke's. But to me, who find full as many extraordinary things, equally inadmissible, in the two last chapters, and several more in the body of the work, the whole appears to be of equal authenticity, or rather, equally spurious and false. With the reader's leave, therefore, we will take a cursory review of the whole.

Of the Genealogy, with which this Gospel begins, it is unnecessary to remark its irreconcileable contradiction to that introduced into Luke's Gospel, because it has been so generally noticed by all commentators, and must strike the most superficial reader, as it traces Joseph's descent from David, through a line totally different: I only wonder that, under such a circumstance, any rational creature can be found, who can really believe both these contradictory pedigrees to be true, and, what is still more, the inspired word of God. My intent, therefore, is only to point out the glaring inconsistency of the author, on this occasion, with himself.

The sole purpose of these two first chapters, is to teach, that Jesus was not the son of

Joseph, but, like Bacchus and Hercules amongst the Pagans, the offspring of Mary, impregnated by the influence of the supreme Deity of heaven. Yet, to prove to us that, as the completion of the old prophecies concerning the Messiah required, he was the lineal descendant of David and Abraham, he gives us the pretended genealogy of Joseph only from those Patriarchs: and with such a proof the orthodox church hath been satisfied for 1600 years!! But whilst the celestial origin he attributes to our blessed Saviour effectually precludes the possibility of many prophecies of the Old Testament, relative to the Christ, being accomplished in his person, the author has endeavoured to persuade us, that the miraculous circumstance he relates of his birth, was predicted in another prophecy, and accordingly refers us to that well known prophecy in Isaiah, c. vii. v. 14. "Behold a young woman shall conceive and "bear a son," &c. The word which I translate *a young woman*, he renders *a virgin*, and insinuates that, by virtue of that single word, the prophet meant a miraculous conception, without the intervention of a man; and that the child intended in the prophecy was the child Jesus. Nothing more, however, is ne-

cessary to convince an unprejudiced person that both these insinuations are perfectly groundless, than to turn to the book of Isaiah itself. We there find that the child, whose birth is predicted, is given to King Ahaz and his subjects, who were alarmed at the prospect of an invasion by the confederate kings of Syria and Samaria, as a sign, that before the child which was at that time to be conceived should be born, and be old enough "to chuse "good from evil," or, as it is repeated in the subsequent chapter, (where the child is expressly said to be a child of Isaiah's, by his own wife, and that he took faithful witnesses to record the time, that they might be certain the promised male child was actually born at nine months from the delivery of the prophecy) before the child should be able to speak, that is, within two years from the day of the prediction, the enemy's country should be deprived of both the menacing kings, who should be slain, and the spoil of Damascus and Samaria be carried away by the king of Assyria. So that the prophecy has no more reference to the age of Augustus Cæsar, or the son of Mary, than it has to the author of this Gospel himself. As to the word translated a virgin, on which so much stress is, in

vain, unreasonably laid, it is evident, that in the original it does not necessarily signify any thing more than a woman young enough to bear children, from its being the very same word which is used in Proverbs, c. xxx. v. 19, and there translated *a maid;* for *a virgin*, in the strict sense of the word, could not be meant in that place, because, "the way of a man with" such an one is by no means trackless and undiscernible; and because the writer expressly uses it to signify a married woman, saying, "such is the way of the *adulterous* woman."

In the second chapter, this writer informs us that our Saviour was born at Bethlehem, in Judea, in direct contradiction to both the histories of Luke, which, by repeatedly calling him Jesus of Nazareth, assure us he was born at Nazareth, in Galilee, as Paul of Tarsus, Timotheus of Derbe, and the like, always signify that those persons were natives of the places so mentioned; and as a reason for his being born there, he alleges a prophecy of Micah, respecting the Messiah, which, if the author had been, I do not say an Apostle of Christ, but merely an intelligent Jew, he could not have so misapprehended or misapplied. The purport of the prophet is simply that of

almost all the prophecies of the Messiah, subsequent to the reign of David, to declare that this predicted Saviour, and prince of peace, would be, not the son of no mortal man, as this writer tells us he was, but the lineally descended son of David, who was a native of Bethlehem, as was his father Jesse and all his family. Not only, therefore, this particularly predicted descendant, but every son of David, is justly said to have sprung originally from Bethlehem, though perhaps not one of them was born there; and provided Jesus was truly the son of David by natural descent, this prophecy would have been equally accomplished in his person, whether he had been born at Bethlehem, Nazareth, or even at Rome. But the ingenious author has more marvels to introduce, in consequence of this misapplication of the prophet Micah, designed, no doubt, to catch the attention and admiration of the ignorant and credulous of his own times. A legation of idolatrous Chaldean Astrologers, who had calculated the nativity of this new-born king of the Jews by a star, though entire aliens from the Jewish Law, is dispatched from the East to do him homage even in his cradle; and when, by the help of this prophecy, the chief priests

and scribes had informed Herod, he informs these Eastern Magi, that he was to be born at Bethlehem: but though he was anxiously solicitous to discover who and where this rival of his throne was; neither curiosity, policy, nor hospitality, induced him either to accompany them himself, or to send any trusty person with them, under the plausible and decent pretext of guiding the extraordinary strangers on their way. The star, however, more humane and hospitable than Herod, led them safe to Bethlehem, (as it might as well have done without inquiring of Herod at all; but then the inhuman massacre and other wonders that follow could have had no place;) and even directed them to the very house where the young child was. In this wonderful story, which, with the generality of people, has so long passed for the infallible word of the God of Truth, there are two circumstances absolutely impossible; the one is, that any splendid object in the atmosphere even a meteor, sufficiently elevated to be, with the least propriety, called a star, should in the nature of things mark out any particular house: for even on a supposition that it was stationed directly over the house, the eye of the beholder could not possibly perceive

that, but must of necessity refer it to the same situation with all the other stars in that part of the firmament opposite to his eye, when looking at the supposed meteor; and, therefore, it must always appear to him equally distant from him with the remotest star in the heavens. The other impossibility is, that the *immutable* Deity, whose word spoken by the Jewish prophets is replete with taunting sneers at the vanity and folly of the pretended science of Astrology, and who expressly commanded all Astrologers amongst his own people to be put to death, should so greatly *change* his sentiments and conduct respecting it, as to give it the most distinguished token of his approbation and encouragement, by permitting Pagan diviners to discover the nativity of the promised Messiah by their skill in Astrology, and become the first promulgers of it to the Jewish Government.

Upon these Astrologers returning home, without giving the Jewish king the intelligence he desired, and which, without depending upon them for it, he might easily have obtained, if he had been possessed of either common decency of conduct towards strangers, or even of common sense, Herod,

violently intent upon the destruction of his infant rival, that he might be sure of murdering the right child, formed and executed, the historian tells us, a project of the most diabolical, unexampled cruelty, in massacreing all the infants "from two years old and "under," that were in Bethlehem and the adjoining country; the writer does not except even the females. Now, if a Tyrant could be found wantonly cruel enough to attempt to execute such a project, it is impossible that the execution of it should not have excited an insurrection of the people. It is not in human nature for all the parents of a whole city, and considerable extent of territory, to submit tamely to have their infants torn from their arms and butchered before their eyes, without opposing the murderers, and endeavouring to secrete or flee away with their children: yet there is no record of such an insurrection; and since the escape of one single child, which it was not in his power to prevent, might defeat his whole aim and intention, Herod must have been, according to this writer, the most senseless as well as most inhuman of men. Luke has recorded many particular anecdotes and domestic circumstances of the princes and chief

persons of the times of which he wrote, and they are all both probable in themselves and confirmed by the testimony of other writers; but this highly improbable story stands upon the very doubtful authority of this Gospel alone, unsupported by the evidence of any other writer, sacred or profane. Josephus and the Roman historians give us particular accounts of the character of this Jewish king, who received his sovereign authority from the Roman emperor, and inform us of other acts of cruelty which he was guilty of in his own family; but of this infamous, inhuman butchery, which to this day remains unparalleled in the annals of tyranny, they are entirely silent. Under such circumstances, if my eternal happiness depended upon it, I could not believe it true: but though I readily exclaim with Horace, *non ego*, I cannot add, as he does, *credat Judæus apella*; for I am confident there is no Jew that reads this chapter, who does not laugh at the ignorant credulity of those professed Christians, who receive such groundless, improbable stories for the inspired word of God, and lay the foundation of their religion upon such incredible fictions as these.

After all, however, we find that this barbarous inhumanity was in vain; for, in obedience to the divine admonition of a dream, Joseph, we are informed, preserved the life of the infant Jesus, by escaping with him into Egypt; and, to give a sanction to his story, he makes this circumstance also the completion of another prophecy of the Old Testament, as he does likewise the massacre of the innocent children, referring us to Hosea, c. xi. v. 1. But as his not understanding the meaning of Micah's prophecy proves the author not to have been a Jew, so his application of a pretended prophecy in this, and the two following instances, prove him to have been a writer who had adopted the maxims of the Pythagorean, and Platonic schools, that deceit and falsehood were allowable in promoting what he deemed the cause of christian piety; for the very reading over the passage of Hosea, here alluded to, is sufficient to convince any man, that the prophet's words in this place have not the least reference to any future event, but are an upbraiding of the Jewish people, for the ungrateful return they had made to God, for his kindness to them, in the infancy of their nation, when he delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. In

the same manner, the passage of Jeremiah, c. xxxi. v. 15, is only a prophecy of the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, fully completed in that event many centuries before the birth of Christ; and which the writer, whoever he was, must know could not, in any sense, apply to the transaction he has recorded; because, the very next words are, "Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that *thy children shall come again to their own border.*" As to the prophecy mentioned in the last verse of this chapter, that the Messiah was to be called a Nazarene, it is not to be found any where else, and therefore must be the mere production of the writer's own fertile imagination, to account, in some manner, for our Lord's being so often spoken of by the title of Jesus of Nazareth; but in the account he has thought fit to give us of the cause of his dwelling at Nazareth, in Galilee, he has betrayed an ignorance of the Geography of Palestine, which cannot be attributed to Matthew, nor to any other native of that

country. He tells us, that Joseph, on his return out of Egypt, after the death of Herod, finding that his son reigned in his stead, was afraid to go into Judea, and therefore, by divine admonition, "turned aside into the "parts of Galilee." Here the reader is requested to remark, first, that Galilee having been as much under Herod's jurisdiction as Judea, and his kingdom having been divided amongst his sons after his death, it was a son of Herod who reigned in his stead, in Galilee as well as in Judea, consequently the child Jesus could be no securer in one province than in the other. He is next desired to cast his eyes upon the map of Palestine, and observe how impossible it was for Joseph to have gone from Egypt to Nazareth, without travelling through the whole extent of Archelaus's kingdom, unless he undertook a long peregrination through the deserts, on the north and east of the lake Asphalites, and the country of Moab, and then either crossed the Jordan into Samaria, or the lake of Gennesareth into Galilee, and from thence went to the city Nazareth: and if it were at all credible, that the latter was the case, with what propriety could such a tedious journey have been denominated, *turning aside into the parts of Galilee?*

III. In the history of John's Baptism, recorded in the third chapter, there are many sentences copied word for word from the Gospel according to Luke, notwithstanding which, it contains one very essential difference, and one direct contradiction to it. The first is in the second verse; where we are told that John preached, "saying, Repent "ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If this account were true, then Jesus and his Apostles could not be the first preachers of the Gospel; for these are the very words they use, to announce the commencement of the Gospel Covenant to the Jews: but Luke informs us, not only in the parallel place of his first history, but also in a speech of Paul, related Acts xix. 4, that John only "preached "the Baptism of repentance for the remis-"sion of sins;"* and since our Saviour tells the Jews, Luke xvi. 16. that the Law and the Prophets, that is, the Mosaic Covenant, subsisted until John, but that since John's time, the New Covenant of the kingdom of God was preached, we may be certain, that

* The advocates of the doctrine of atonement and satisfaction would do well to consider, how the supposed sacrifice of the death of Jesus could be necessary to the Deity's pardoning the sins of mankind, when, before the ministry of Jesus, John was commissioned by God to preach the remission of sins, on condition of repentanc only.

John's mission was only preparatory to that of Jesus; and that Jesus was the first promulger of the Gospel Covenant, and of the supersession of the Old Covenant, by the commencement of the kingdom of God, or, as this author calls it, the kingdom of heaven, in the world. This passage therefore is one, and as we proceed, there will be occasion to point out several other proofs, that the writer of this history, whoever he was, did not understand the phrase kingdom of God, in the sense in which only it is used by our Lord himself, in the prayer he taught his disciples, by Luke, and by every other primitive preacher of the Gospel. In the seventh verse, the latter half of which is transcribed literally from Luke, we are told that this memorable prophetic exclamation of the Baptist, "O Generation of Vipers, who hath "warned you to flee from the wrath to "come?" was addressed to "many of the "*Pharisees* and Sadducees, who came to his "Baptism," in flat contradiction to Luke, who not only affirms it was made to the whole "multitude of the Jews, that came to "be baptised of him," but c. vii. v. 30, expressly assures us, "that the *Pharisees* and "Lawyers were not baptized of him." It is

not possible, that both these contradictory assertions should be true; and on which the guilt of falsehood rests, every man must judge for himself.

IV. The fourth chapter commences with the most extraordinary and incredible narrative of our Lord's forty days' fast, and subsequent temptation, by that manichean, imaginary being, denominated the Devil. A narrative, which, I have before observed, there is the strongest reason to believe, was from hence interpolated into Luke's history, in the second century, together with the story of his Baptism by John. And as the mortification of long fasting, or (to use Paul's prophetic language, respecting the first authors of the apostasy from the true religion of Christ) frequent *abstinence from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving*, was held amongst the sect of the Encratites, that arose early in the second century, to be the next meritorious virtue to celibacy and unnatural chastity, there seems no doubt but that the whole Gospel, and this fable in particular, was the production of one of that apostate sect of professed Christians, with a view to authorize and encou-

rage the general adoption of the tenets of their own superstition, by the pretended example of our Lord himself. In verses 13, 14, 15, we have another remarkable instance of the author's very imperfect knowledge of the geography of Palestine, which cannot be supposed of any native of the country; as well as another direct contradiction to the much more probable account given us by Luke. As if he imagined the city of Nazareth was not as properly in Galilee, as Capernaum was, (which indeed seems implied also in the second chapter, where he tells us Joseph "went aside," not into Galilee, but "into "the parts or coasts of Galilee,") he informs us, that after John's imprisonment, our Saviour *departed into Galilee, and, leaving Nazareth, came and dwelt at Capernaum*, in order to fulfil a saying of Isaiah's, respecting the country *beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles*. Now to Isaiah, or any inhabitant of Judea, the country *beyond* must be the country *east* of the Jordan, as Gaulanitis or Galilee of the Gentiles, is well known to have been; whereas, Capernaum was a city on the *western* side of the lake of Gennesareth, through which the Jordan flows. This whole story of the removal of Jesus from Na-

zareth *to dwell* at Capernaum, is also in direct opposition to the history of Luke; for he assures us, c. iv. that the reason of our Lord's leaving Nazareth was, because the inhabitants, offended with his discourse to them, drove him out of their city, with intent to throw him headlong from an adjoining precipice; but that he escaped through the midst of them, and went down to Capernaum, where he preached to the people for a short time, and wrought many miracles of healing; but was so far from taking up his *dwelling* there, that, though the inhabitants entreated him to stay and *not depart from them*, he left them saying, he must *preach the kingdom of God to other cities also*; for that was the purpose of his mission.

In the last verse of this chapter, the author informs us, that great multitudes of people followed Jesus, amongst other places, from Decapolis; and speaks of this Decapolis, not only as a particular country or province, but as a country, which did not lie eastward of the Jordan, because he expressly distinguishes it from "the country *beyond* "Jordan:" and the writer called Mark, speaking of the same Decapolis, c. vii. v. 31, more than insinuates that it was a country

lying north-west of the sea of Galilee; for he tells us, that Jesus "came from the coasts of "Tyre and Sidon, to the sea of Galilee, "*through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis.*" These are circumstances, which merit the critical attention of every candid reader, who wishes to satisfy himself, respecting the true time when these two Gospels were really written: for no such country as Decapolis is once mentioned by any other writer of either Testament; and, from the geographical description of Palestine, given us by Luke, confirmed both by Josephus and Tacitus, it appears that in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, and during his whole reign, the Jewish territory was divided by the Romans into four tetrarchies, Judea in the south, which was governed by a Roman prefect; the north-eastern tetrarchy, which contained Trachonitis, Iturea, and Batanea, with Gaulanitis, or Galilee, east of the Jordan, under the government of Philip, a son of Herod; the western, comprehending Galilee proper, and all the country west of the Jordan, and north of the prefecture of Judea, to which was annexed the province of Perea, on the eastern banks of the Jordan, governed by Herod, another son of Herod the great; and Abilene, so

called from its metropolis Abila, including, except Perea, all Palestine east of the Jordan, and south of Gaulanitis, subject to the dominion of Lysanias. Under this division by the Romans, its conquerors, Palestine seems to have remained, until the reign of of the emperor Claudius, who, Tacitus informs us,* erected several smaller principalities or prefectures in that country, to gratify his freedmen and favourite Roman knights, alluding, most probably, to the toparchies that Judea was, at length, divided into, which are enumerated, though with some little difference, by Josephus and the elder Pliny, and to some others which are occasionally mentioned by Josephus. In the twelfth year of his reign, Claudius† gave the country, which had formed the tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias, as a kingdom, to Agrippa: but though Josephus particularly describes the kingdom allotted by the Emperor to that Jewish prince, and the several additional grants of territory, which were made to him afterwards; though several of the ten cities which, Pliny tells us, were generally reckoned to compose the Decapolis, were situated in the country expressly said to be

* Hist. l. v. c. 9. † Jos. Ant. l. xx. c. 5

assigned to Agrippa; and though, in the preceding parts of his histories, he has repeatedly given us accurate geographical definitions of the several provinces of Palestine and the adjacent countries, no such province or ethnarchy, as Decapolis, is taken notice of by Josephus, nor does he once mention the name, before Vespasian was governor of Syria, and general against the rebellious Jews, in the latter end of Nero's reign, and then only says of it,* that "Scythopolis was "the largest city of the Decapolis;" and, though he afterwards, (in his life) several times, mentions the cities intended by the name Decapolis, he never again uses that aggregate term, of the singular number; but calls them the *ten cities of Syria*: and since he speaks of the insurrection of the Jewish against the Syrian inhabitants of some of those cities, it is natural to conclude that, from some particular motives, the Romans had been induced to annex ten Jewish cities to the government of Syria, and to place in them colonies of Syrians, to whom the Hebrew inhabitants could not be reconciled; and as the first disturbances amongst the Jews began in that part of Palestine

* Bell. l. iii. c. 16.

which formed the kingdom of Agrippa, it is most probable, that those rebellious insurrections gave rise to the establishment of such a line of military stations, peculiarly subject to the authority of the Proconsul of Syria, and that before that period of Nero's reign, the very name Decapolis did not exist. At least, since Pliny tells us,* that the territory which intervened between those ten cities, and which surrounded each of them, was not subject to the same government as the cities themselves, but to the adjoining tetrarchies, and Josephus informs us, that all those ten cities appertained to the government of Syria, it is evident that the Decapolis was not any distinct country or continued district, as the pretended Matthew and Mark represent it, but merely the general appellation of ten detached, insulated cities, lying all, except Scythopolis, *beyond*, or east of, the river Jordan, which in later times, for some military convenience to the Romans, were taken from the jurisdiction of the original tetrarchies, (most of them probably long after the time allotted for the writing these Gospels) and made subject to Syria. So that to talk of any person's going to or coming from the Decapolis,

* Nat. Hist. l. v. c. 18.

without specifying which of the ten cities is meant, is to use a language devoid of meaning and perfectly unintelligible: and to speak of it as a province, like Galilee or Trachonitis, and as being situated north-west of the Sea of Galilee, is to betray an ignorance of the geography of Palestine too gross to be attributed to any native of that country; and shews that the authors were not primitive disciples of Jesus Christ, but writers of a much later date, who, being personally unacquainted with the country, adopted a term they had heard applied to it, whose signification they did not understand.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW,

CONTINUED.

SECTION I.

THE fifth and two following chapters contain what is commonly called, our Lord's sermon upon the mount, a desultory, unconnected harangue, composed of many passages, taken, almost verbatim, from the discourses which Luke has related to us, as held upon many different occasions, with additions either deduced from the writings of the Old Testament, or according with the author's own ideas of Christianity. Concerning the first circumstance, as well as all the other parts of this Gospel, which are expressed exactly, or very nearly, in the words of Luke, I have only to observe, that either Luke must have copied them from this book, or this writer must have adopted them from Luke; but as Luke in both his histories has shewn himself to be a good and elegant writer of the Greek language,

whilst this writer's language, wherever it does not verbally correspond with Luke, is bad, abounding with barbarous idioms, no impartial person can doubt but that it was written after Luke's; and that the bad writer borrowed from the good one, the only flowers which adorn his work, and not the good from the bad.

That such a discourse as this was delivered by our Saviour, at such a time and in such a place, is in the highest degree improbable; for being addressed particularly to his disciples, if it was delivered at all, it must have been intended as a lesson of instruction in Christian ethics, to them in general, and especially to his Apostles, who were to teach the same doctrines to the world: it is but reasonable, therefore, to suppose that so full and ample a moral lecture would have been postponed, at least, till all those who were to be his Apostles, were called to be his disciples, and actually appointed to their office. Accordingly, Luke informs us this really was the case; and that the first moral lesson given to his disciples particularly, but in the audience of a great multitude of people, was delivered after he had chosen the twelve Apostles. That instructive discourse is recorded by Luke, c. vi. v. 20, &c.

and, what is worthy of notice, begins, like this we are considering, with beatitudes of encouragement to his followers; and though this writer has greatly altered their sense and import, and added several to the number, and has omitted the woes entirely, yet from the first and last beatitude he has given us, as well as from many entire passages of Luke interwoven in different parts of this sermon, it is evident he had Luke's Gospel before him. So inconsistent, however, is this writer, not with Luke only, but with himself, that from his ninth chapter, v. 9, we find that Matthew, the very Apostle who is supposed to be the author of this book, and to have so circumstantially recorded this long, incoherent, moral lecture, was not so much as called to follow our Saviour, till some time after it was delivered; and consequently the Apostles were chosen still later, as mentioned, c. x. So much for the time when this sermon is said to have been preached. Respecting the place of its delivery, I beg leave to observe, that, as Luke explicitly assures us was the case, though our Lord addressed himself, in the first place to his disciples, yet he intended his instructions also for the whole multitude of auditors, with which he was surrounded; indeed, if he had not, he

would have acted directly contrary to his own doctrine, and instead of displaying the moral light of his religion to the people, would have *covered it with a bushel:* and since this writer himself tells us, that "when Jesus had ended "these sayings, the people were astonished at "his doctrine," and that when he descended from his mountainous pulpit "great multitudes "followed him," we must conclude that this discourse was intended to be, and actually was, heard by the surrounding multitude. Now let any man, who knows what it is to speak to a crowd of people, conceive what situation a speaker, who wished to be heard by as many as possible, would choose for himself on such an occasion. If the people were in an open plain, he would endeavour to take the advantage of some small rise in the ground, or other mode of elevating himself, so as to be seen by his audience; or, if an hill were adjoining, he would ascend the slope of the hill a little way, so as to answer that purpose, whilst the people remained in the plain, or if they ascended the side of the hill, he would accomplish the same effect, by remaining himself at the foot of it, in the plain: but would any man in his senses, so circumstanced, and intending to be heard by the

crowd, go up to the top of the hill, which from its convex form, must necessarily prevent, all but those who immediately surrounded him, from either seeing or hearing him, and even there set himself down before he began to teach them? Yet precisely such is the situation in which the author of this history makes our Saviour place himself to instruct the people, in the moral duties of the Gospel. Luke, on the contrary, informs us, that when he gave his disciples and the whole multitude that instructive lesson, after the choice of his Apostles, "he came down and stood in the "plain;" and that, on another previous occasion, on the banks of the lake of Gennesareth, he went into a fishing-boat, and, being at a little distance from the land, he sat down and taught the people who stood on the shore.

In the seventeenth verse of the fifth chapter, our Lord is represented as saying, "Think "not that I am come to destroy the Law; I "am not come to destroy, but to fulfil;" an assertion which flatly contradicts the prophets of the Old Testament, as also Luke and Paul, and the whole scope and intent of the Gospel Covenant.

At the time when Moses administered to the Jews the Old Covenant of the Law, he

informed them it was to continue only till the coming of that prophet of a New Covenant, whom the Lord their God would raise up up unto them, from amongst their brethren, like unto himself; for says he,* "unto him "shall ye hearken, and whosoever will not "hearken unto my words, which he shall "speak in my name, (saith the Lord God) I "will require it of him." By the prophet Jeremiah, God says,† "Behold the days "come, when I will make a New Covenant "with Israel and Judah, not according to the "Covenant which I made with their fathers, "when I brought them out of Egypt; but "(instead of a Law written upon tables of "stone) I will put my Law in their inward "parts, and write it in their hearts." Accordingly, Jesus Christ declares of the New Covenant,‡ that the kingdom of God intended to be established by it, is not an object of external observation, but is *within* those who receive it. He affirms also,§ that the Law of Moses ended with John the Baptist; and that, since the time of his imprisonment, the New Covenant of the kingdom of God is preached to the whole world. In confirma-

* Deut. c. xviii. v. 15, &c.
† Jer. c. xxxi. v. 31, &c.
‡ Luke c. xvii. v. 20 & 21.
§ Luke c. xvi. v. 16.

tion of this assertion, he denounced the speedy destruction of that temple, the existence of which was absolutely necessary for the ritual observances of the Mosaic Law; and, without any suggestion that it would ever be rebuilt, declares that Jerusalem itself "shall "be trodden down of the Gentiles," until the new covenant of his Gospel is actually established in the nations of the earth. That such was the doctrine also of the disciples of Jesus, immediately after their miraculous delegation to preach the Gospel covenant, is evident from the history of Stephen's death; for though he was falsely accused of *blaspheming the temple and the law of Moses*, we find that the sole ground of this accusation was, his having said that "Jesus of Nazareth would destroy their temple, and change the customs which Moses delivered them:" and in his answer, he is so far from denying or retracting that doctrine which was the same that his master had always taught, that his whole discourse to the council of the Jews is calculated to prove the truth of it. He reminds them, that the covenant made with Abraham preceded that of Moses, and was to continue till the object of it was accomplished in the appearance of that promised

seed of the Patriarch, in whom all the kindreds of the earth are to be blessed; that when Moses established the covenant of the Law, he assured them it would be superseded by a future prophet, whom they were to obey, and whom he then predicted to them; and that under the new covenant of this promised prophet whom they had just crucified, temples according to the prophecy of Isaiah relating to the very same period, were of no kind of use; and that it was mere superstition to imagine that the Almighty inhabited temples of human structure; "heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool; what house will ye build me? saith the Lord, or where is the place of my rest?" At such instruction as this, Luke informs us, the Jews were highly enraged; and, upon Stephen's extatic exclamation, that he beheld Jesus exalted to the station of the predicted Messiah, at the right hand of God, consequently endued with power to vanquish all his foes, and to accomplish, according to his own prophecies, the destruction of their city and temple, and with it, the abolition of the Mosaic Covenant, they ran upon him furiously, ejected him from the city, and stoned him, as one fully convicted of the charge which the witnesses had

alleged against him. Paul, likewise, who had himself consented to the death of Stephen as just and legal, afterwards, in his discourse to the Athenians, urged this same doctrine of Isaiah, that the use of temples, and the worshipping God with external rites and ceremonies, were abolished under the Gospel dispensation: and, in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, he adduces the very same arguments suggested by Stephen, respecting the two Old Covenants, and expressly declares, that the covenant of the Law of Moses was only added to the covenant made with Abraham "till the seed should come to whom the promise was made;" that, therefore, the Law was only the Schoolmaster of the Jewish nation, to educate them for a manly maturity in the rational religion of Jesus Christ; and that, now the Christian faith is come, "they are no longer under a Schoolmaster." Indeed common sense assures us, that the declarations which God made to the Jews by their prophets, that, in time to come, he would give them a new law, and make a new covenant with them, must imply the abolition of the old; for the subsistence of an old covenant, with only some new additions made to it, can with no

more propriety be called a new covenant, than an old garment, upon the addition of lace or fringes, could be called a new garment: and from Paul's argument to the Galatians it plainly appears, that, under the new covenant of the Gospel, it were as unreasonable even for the Jews themselves to recur to the ritual observances of the Mosaic Law, as it would be for men arrived at the maturity of manhood, again to subject themselves to the circumstances of childhood, and submit to the discipline of the ferula and rod. So gross a contradiction of the uniform doctrine of the best authenticated scriptures, both of the Old Testament and the New, can never be justly nor reasonably attributed to an Apostle of Jesus Christ, but must be the composition of a much later writer, who himself did not understand either the genius or the doctrines of the religion he hath presumed to teach.

To the same ignorance or misapprehension, respecting the abolition of temples under the New Covenant, must be ascribed also what the author puts into our Lord's mouth, in the following verses, about *altars*, and *gifts to be offered* upon them, all which are peculiar to this writer. Indeed, it would be both cu-

rious and useful to extract from this sermon, and other parts of his book, all the unsupported doctrines that are to be met with only in this writer: but my present intent is merely to advert to such passages as are absolutely irreconcilable to better authenticated scriptures.

In this lecture to his disciples, c. vi. v. 5—13, our Saviour is made to give them ample directions for the manner of offering up their prayers to God, and to teach them the very formulary he would have them use, which is commonly known by the name of the Lord's Prayer. Their so early instruction, however, in the use of this prayer, is directly contradictory to the account given us by Luke, who informs us, that long after the time allotted to the sermon on the mount, even some time after the return of the seventy disciples, they were so far from having already received this instruction, that, observing their master in prayer to God, when he had finished, one of them entreated him to teach them to pray, as John the Baptist had taught his disciples; and immediately, without reminding them or upbraiding them for not remembering what he had taught them before, he began to teach them, as for the first time, this very form of

prayer. Here one of these two writers must certainly have given us a false account. It is to be observed, that the Doxology which closes this prayer, according to the supposed Matthew, is not found in any copy of the prayer recorded by Luke; and if I thought it had been inserted by the writer himself, I should urge it as another proof that he did not understand the Gospel meaning of the phrase *kingdom of God*; and that, by the addition of this Doxology, he has made nonsense of the prayer; but, though the orthodox church still continues to make use of it, the best critics have very satisfactorily shewn that it did not exist in the original copies of even this work;* and, therefore, it must be the addition of some later copyist, who understood

* Of this the Reformers of the English Church were so well convinced, that, from the time of Elizabeth, to the rebellion in the reign of Charles I. in the established Book of Common Prayer, the Doxology is not once printed. And whoever will look into that edition of the Liturgy, which was printed so late as the year 1640, will see that this was not an accidental omission, but the result of mature deliberation: because, where the Lord's Prayer is abbreviated in the printing, thus, "Our Father, &c." the abbreviation is hardly ever carried on to the end. But the &c. is followed by the last petition, "And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. Amen." Yet ever since the æra of the Restoration, so much more unskilled in biblical history, or so much less attentive to propriety, have the leading English Clergy been than their predecessors at the Reformation, that the Doxology has ever since been printed in most places where that Prayer occurs, and continues to be in general use.

not what Jesus meant by "thy kingdom "come," and whose weak mind supposed the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth, like human sovereigns, to be pleased with fawning, flattering expressions, and superfluous, verbal acknowledgments of his power and greatness.

In the sixteenth, and following verses, the pretended Matthew represents our Lord as teaching his disciples in what manner they should fast; a doctrine quite inconsistent, not only with what Luke assures us, but even with what this writer himself, c. ix. v. 14, &c. has copied from Luke, viz. that his disciples did not fast at all; and that such formal, carnal observances of the Jewish ritual, were by no means suited to the genius of that new religion, which he came to establish in the world.

In chapter vii. verse 6, we find a vulgar proverb, antecedent to the mission of Jesus Christ, converted into a precept of the Gospel—"Give not that which is holy unto the "dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before "swine, lest they trample them under their "feet, and turn again and rent you." If these words have any meaning in this place, it must be to prohibit the teaching his holy religion, and propounding the valuable doctrines of the

Gospel to such profligate, profane, and brutal characters, as it was probable would only treat their instructions with scorn and contempt, and reward their zeal with persecution and personal violence. Yet such a precept is directly contrary to the well-known constant practice of our Lord himself, and all his Apostles, and utterly repugnant to the most explicit, repeated lessons of duty urged upon his disciples on other occasions; the uniform tenor of which is, that in preaching the Gospel they must expect and be prepared to endure odium, contempt, and ignominy, and the most cruel persecutions of every kind, even unto death.

II. In the eighth chapter, this writer records the story of the healing the Centurion's servant, but with circumstances directly contradictory to Luke's account of the same miracle; for he tells us that the centurion came to our Lord himself, and conversed with him in person; whereas Luke informs us, that he only sent a deputation to him of the Elders of the Jews, and declared that he did not think himself worthy to come to him, and for that reason did not come himself. Here again one of these historians must relate a

falsehood. It is observable also, that, according to this Gospel called Matthew's, this miracle, in order of time, preceded the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the calling of Matthew himself, and the choice of the twelve Apostles; whereas Luke tells us that it was subsequent to all the three. Yet Luke assures Theophilus, that having attained perfect information of every thing from the very first, he had written him an account of every transaction *in order*. Now, he could have received his information only from the Apostles he lived with at Jerusalem, of whom Matthew was one; and, as it is impossible but Matthew must have known whether he was himself with Jesus, when this miracle was wrought, or not, he could not have written that he was not, and have informed Luke that he was; and therefore the writer of this Gospel could not be Matthew, nor any other of the Apostles. To avoid unnecessary repetitions, the reader is desired to consider this as a general remark upon the many instances of contradiction, in the order of the narration, between this writer and Luke, which are both numerous, and obvious to the least degree of attention.

In the conclusion of this chapter, the author has introduced also the miracle of the Demons and the herd of Swine; but having in the second chapter literally out-heroded Herod, he was determined here to out-do the interpolater himself; for he makes two demoniacs instead of one, and, of course, two legions of devils.

In the enumeration of the names of the twelve Apostles in the tenth chapter, the first remarkable circumstance is the author's representing the Apostle Andrew as Simon Peter's brother, which indeed he had prepared us for in the fourth, by telling us expressly that he was so, and that he was called to be an Apostle at the same time, and in the same terms, with Peter. Luke, on the contrary, informs us, that no such person as Andrew was with Peter at the time of his call; that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were his only partners; and that his destination to be an Apostle, implied in the words, "from henceforth thou shalt catch men," was announced to him alone in the singular number, and not in the plural, as this author relates it. Indeed, from both Luke's Histories, as no brother of Peter is once spoken of, it is most obvious, that he

had no brother; and since in the enumeration of the names of the Apostles, in Acts i. James and John intervene before Andrew, it appears that there was no family connexion between him and Peter. The next circumstance deserving our observation* is, that the Apostles James and John are said to be brothers, and sons of Zebedee. Yet, from Luke's Histories, and, from Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, it plainly appears, that James the Apostle was the brother of the Lord Jesus, and that the two sons of Zebedee, were not Apostles, but are the brothers mentioned, Acts xii. v. 2; of whom James was put to death by Herod, and the other brother, John, was most probably the same whose surname was Mark. Nothing can be more express than Paul's assertion, that the Apostle James was the Lord's brother; who consequently could not be James, the son of Alpheus. And Luke clearly informs us of the same thing, when telling us, c. xxiii. v. 55, that the women, who came with him from Galilee, beheld the sepulchre, and how his

* For this remark of the ignorance, not only of this writer, but also of the pretended Mark and John, respecting the relationship of the Apostle James to the Lord Jesus, which affords such a decisive proof of the spuriousness of these three Gospels, the Author is obliged to Mr. Richard Foster, of Dalton, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire, who, in 1796, favoured him with a letter upon the subject, but who, he is sorry to say, in other respects, still remains an entire stranger to him.

body was laid, and prepared spices to embalm it; and, mentioning their names in c. xxiv. v. 10, to be Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, tells us also that James was brother of the Lord Jesus; for, from Luke viii. 2, 3, 19, it appears, that no other Mary, but Mary Magdalene, came with Jesus out of Galilee, except his own mother, who accompanied him with all her children. And Luke calls her, in c. xxiv. the mother of James, because Jesus himself was no longer living. But in Acts i. where the history informs us Jesus was alive again, the same Mary is again called the mother of Jesus. Now, if the author of this Gospel had himself been an Apostle, he could not possibly have called his brother Apostles, James and John, sons of Zebedee, when he must have known that they never were Apostles, and that the Apostle James was the brother of Jesus. A circumstance, which satisfactorily accounts for James being made the President of the Council of the Apostles resident at Jerusalem.

In proceeding with this Author's enumeration, instead of Judas the Son, or, as our translators chose to render it, the brother of James, mentioned by Luke, we read "Leb-

beus surnamed Thaddeus;" to account for this seeming contradiction, commentators observe, that Thaddeus is a Syrian word of much the same signification with Judas: but if Matthew wrote any Gospel, he wrote it in Hebrew, not in Syriac; and had he adopted a Syrian, instead of the Hebrew name of his brother-apostle, still any consistent writer would have repeated the same Syrian denomination for the same name, and the last of the twelve also would have been called Thaddeus Iscarriot. As Luke conversed and lived long with all the Apostles, he could not be ignorant of the name by which they called the son of James; and therefore this writer cannot be one of them, because he would then, as usual, have called him Judas, not Thaddeus, and still less Lebbeus.

In chapter xi. v. 12, not to remark upon the confused jumble of two distinct conversations of our Saviour, which in Luke are separated by the intervention of no less than nine chapters, the author affords us a very striking proof of his entire ignorance of the Gospel meaning of the phrase, the kingdom of God, or, as he calls it, of heaven; for, not comprehending the sense of Luke, c. xvi. v. 16, he says, "From the days of John the Baptist, *until*

now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." From the days of John the Baptist, until the age of this writer, I have no doubt, was a period of many years; but what sense can the words *until now* have, supposing them to have been used by our Saviour whilst John was living, and within two months, or perhaps less, after his baptizing and preaching publicly? And in what meaning can the New Covenant of the kingdom of God, which was in no degree established in the world, till after our Lord's resurrection, be said, at any time, but especially at the very beginning of his ministry, *to suffer violence*, and *to be taken forcibly by violent men*? Can any unprejudiced person believe, that an Apostle of Jesus Christ could be the author of such a sentence?

In chapter xii. v. 14—21, we have another instance of the uncommon ingenuity of this writer, in the application of the old prophecies so conspicuously displayed by him in the first and second chapters of his work. Not to dwell upon the impossibility of a person's remaining unknown, who was *followed by great multitudes*, and healed all the sick whom those multitudes brought unto him, consequently the unreasonable absurdity of such a person's

charging the multitudes not to make him known, the writer tells us, that this very circumstance was the completion of a well known prophecy of Isaiah respecting the Messiah, which, like many prophecies of the New Testament, predicts, that the religion of the new covenant should be embraced by the Gentiles, and that all nations will become subject to the authority of Christ; a prophecy which at this day remains to be fulfilled, and which had therefore no more reference to the circumstances here recorded of our Saviour, than the prophecy of the return of the Jews from their Babylonish captivity, applied in the second chapter, had to the pretended slaughter of the infants.

At verse 40, the author, not understanding our Lord's meaning about the sign which Jonas was to the Ninevites, as recorded by Luke, not only shews that his credulity easily swallowed the fabulous legend of the prophet in the whale's belly; but, in order to make out some kind of similitude between his situation there and our Saviour's, tells us, that as Jonas was confined in that extraordinary prison three days and three nights, so the son of man should be *three days and three nights* in the heart of the earth. Even this pre-

tended similitude, however, has not one corresponding feature in the two parts; for, in the first place, our Lord was in the grave only one day and two nights; and, in the next, Jonas, according to this incredible story, was alive the whole time, praying to and praising God, whereas Jesus was amongst the dead, and buried, of whom the Psalmist says,* "the dead praise not thee, O Lord, "neither they that go down into silence."

III. In the thirteenth chapter we find that, according to this writer, our Lord had greatly changed his mode of preaching to the people since the time of his delivering to them his sermon on the mount: for though in that ample collection of unconnected moral aphorisms, there is scarcely any thing like a parable to be met with, now, the author tell us, "he spake not unto them without a parable." Accordingly, the whole of his discourses given us in this chapter, both from the ship and even after he was come into the house, except where they are interrupted by explanations to his disciples alone, consists of a collection of seven parables, three of which are evidently borrowed from Luke; two of them ver-

* Psalm cxv. 17.

batim, and the other four are the author's own composition. To this circumstance the reader's particular attention is requested; for, I persuade myself, there is no person of taste or feeling, who has attentively read the writings of Luke, and has not admired the parables of his first, and the speeches of his second history, as pieces of masterly composition, whether he considers the elegant simplicity of the diction, the justness and force of the sentiment and doctrine intended to be conveyed by them, or the strict propriety, and consistency of character, of the several agents or speakers introduced, either allegorical or real: but whoever impartially considers the various parables, related by the writer called Matthew, will find that every one of them, which is not taken from Luke, is grossly defective in some or all of those particulars; and that, of those which he has evidently copied from Luke, there is not one which is not injured, exactly in the proportion in which he has thought fit to deviate from the very words of Luke. Of all this, the parables that compose this chapter afford us most striking examples. The first is the well known parable of the sower; from several circumstances of which, it is *as clear as*

light,* as Dr. Mills expresses it, that the author must have borrowed it, and transcribed several sentences from Luke; but he has chosen to vary some parts of the phraseology, and, instead of telling us, in the words of the latter, that "some fell upon a rock, and, "as soon as it sprung up, it withered away "because it lacked moisture," he says, "some "fell on stoney places, where they (the *seeds*) "had not much earth, and forthwith they "sprung up, because they had no depth of "earth, and when the sun was up they were "scorched, and because they had not root "they withered away." Here the concise simplicity and strict propriety of Luke's expression, and the awkwardly laboured periphrasis of this author, together with the false idea it suggests, that seed vegetates the sooner for want of depth of soil, form so glaring a contrast, as must surely strike every attentive reader: and where Luke tells us, "other fell on good ground, and "sprang up, and bare fruit an hundred fold," this writer says, no doubt, with intent to improve upon his model, that "other fell "into good ground, and brought forth fruit, "some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and

* Lucæ Clarius.

"some thirty fold." Now, if the criterion of good ground be, its producing an hundred fold, that which produces only thirty or even sixty fold, is certainly not good ground; and the author, instead of apprehending our Saviour's meaning, in the parable recorded by Luke, seems to have been misled into these three different degrees of produce, of what he calls *good ground*, by the very dissimilar parable of the talents, and an attention to the different capacities of men; but that difference is by no means the object of this parable, as stated by Luke; and, therefore, he is far from attributing the product of the fruit of the Gospel, in any degree, like this writer, to the mental capacity of the hearer, but represents his Master as teaching us, that by the seed on the good ground, is meant all those, who, "in an honest and "good heart, having heard the word, keep it, "and bring forth fruit with patience." The intellectual abilities of men, indeed, vary as greatly as the degrees of their bodily strength, but in capacity for moral virtue they are all equal; the weakest and most illiterate may possess as honest and as good a heart, as the wisest and most exalted genius that ever lived: the moral virtue of the latter may have

a more extensive influence than that of the former, but that difference is merely accidental; his heart cannot be justly represented as a better and more fruitful soil in its proportion, though it might, with propriety, be compared to a more extensive field of equally productive soil, whose produce must of consequence be more extensively beneficial.

The second parable of this collection is entirely the author's own; and the reader will in vain search in it for that propriety of expression, and consistency of doctrine, which are so eminently conspicuous in Luke's compositions of the same kind. It begins with resembling the kingdom of heaven to "a "man who sowed good seed in his field;" but what idea must this writer have formed to himself, of the meaning of *the kingdom of heaven*, that he could think of likening it to a husbandman? The kingdom of heaven (or, as it is always called by other writers, of God, or of Christ, as that phrase is used by Jesus in the prayer he taught his disciples, by Luke, Paul, and John in the apocalypse) uniformly signifies, as I have before observed, the dutiful state of submission and obedience of mankind, to the terms of the New Covenant

of the Gospel; and what similitude can there be between such a state of the world, and the husbandman in this parable? It is said, indeed, to obviate objections to many solecisms that are observable in the language of some parts of the canonical scriptures, that though the miraculous gift of tongues supplied the writers with a knowledge of different languages, so far as to enable them to make themselves understood by those to whom they preached the Gospel; it did not endow them with that elegance, and propriety of diction, which is acquired gradually by the cultivation of natural learning: but why the knowledge of any language, infused into the mind at once, by the influence of divine inspiration, should be less complete and perfect than the slower attainments of human industry and application, is not easy to see. It is certain, if Luke acquired his Greek on the memorable day of Pentecost, few scholars, in the ordinary ways of learning, could ever make a greater proficiency; and, whether he did or not, it must be remembered that, according to all those who tell us this history was written by Matthew, he wrote it not in Greek, but in his

own native language, Hebrew: and what credit or regard ought to be paid to an unknown translator, who presumes to translate any work, and, above all, a work of importance, into a language of which he himself is not thoroughly master? A work, however, so evidently borrowed in many passages, and in some literally transcribed, from Luke, and in all the rest of it so badly written, cannot be a translation of any original Hebrew work; but must have been composed, in the very form in which we have received it, long after the publication of the Gospel of Luke, and consequently not by Matthew nor any other Apostle. Indeed if, after all the instructions of their great Master, and the supernatural illumination of their minds, by divine inspiration, any one of them could still remain so ignorant of the propriety of the common forms of speech, as to tells us, our Saviour compared *the kingdom* to the personage of his parable, who represents *the King*, he was very unlike those preachers of Christianity, whom we read of in the Acts, and very unfit for the important object of his mission. But let us pass by this obvious solecism at the beginning, and attend to the

meaning of the parable, as it is explained by the author himself, v. 37, &c. We are there given to understand that, according to the system of the Manichees, the world, even under the Gospel Covenant, is still subject to the influence of two opposite principles, counteracting each other; that as fast as Jesus Christ, the delegate of God, sows the seeds of virtue and righteousness amongst men, his equally potent enemy, the Devil, sows the seeds of vice and wickedness; that God himself cannot cause the wicked to be rooted out of the world, without destroying the righteous with them; that, therefore, the good and bad will always remain blended together amongst men, whilst the world lasts; but that, at the end of the world, the angels will separate them, and the wicked will be thrown into hell-fire; but the righteous will be received with honour into *the kingdom of God*. By the writer's giving that appellation to the future existence of the virtuous, in a state of happiness and immortality in heaven, it is manifest that, whoever he was, he did not understand our Saviour's meaning in that expression, so frequently used by him, and so peculiar to his Gospel; for, besides

that no other writer of the New Testament uses it in that sense, the obvious meaning of the second petition of the Lord's Prayer, and of all the prophecies of both Testaments, relating to the Messiah or Christ, makes it refer merely to the state of human affairs in the present world, and not to that future state which is to succeed the general resurrection: and, instead of teaching us, like this parable, that sin and wickedness will continue amongst men to the end of this world, all the other scriptures assure us, that the very purpose of the mission of Christ, and the preaching his Gospel, is to eradicate, and put an end to; the growth of these tares of vice and iniquity; and that the reformed state of mankind in the present world, under the universal influence of the righteousness and moral virtue of the Gospel, is what is peculiarly denominated *the kingdom of God*, or of his Christ. Who then can believe that an Apostle of Jesus Christ could either be so ignorant of the great end and design of the Gospel, or so culpably daring as to put into the mouth of our blessed Saviour a doctrine so absurdly false and impious as is taught us in this parable, and so directly contradictory to every idea

given us of the new covenant of the Messiah by all the other sacred writers, whether Jews or Christians?

The two prophetic parables or similitudes introduced at verses 31 and 33, are transcribed evidently from Luke; so that there is nothing worthy of remark in them, except that the author, from his own misconceived idea, that what Luke calls *the kingdom of God*, means the future state of the virtuous in heaven, has, in both these cases, changed it for *the kingdom of heaven*, as he has done in most instances throughout his book, though he is the only writer who has made that alteration of the phrase.

In the two next parables, verses 44, 45, and 46, we have the same idea held out to us of the kingdom of heaven, as meaning a future state of happiness; only in the latter, the author has been guilty of a similar solecism to that observed in the parable of the wheat and tares; and, instead of comparing the eternal happiness of heaven to *the pearl of great value*, as he does to the hidden treasure in the former, he here compares it to the trader, who purchases the pearl.

In the last of these seven parables, v. 47, this writer gives us another idea of *the king-*

dom of heaven, according to which, it signifies, neither the earthly nor the heavenly state of men, but the day of general judgment, and final distribution of punishments and rewards to the wicked and the just. So little consistent is he with himself, as well as so contradictory to the best attested scriptures?

IV. In the fourteenth chapter, we have a very singular story told us, of the cause of the death of John the Baptist; but it is the peculiar fate of this historian, to have almost all the uncommon facts he has related, unconfirmed by any other writer. Luke, though he mentions John's being beheaded by Herod, speaks of it in the person of Herod, as his own voluntary act, and gives not the least hint, that he was artfully drawn in to murder him, against his own inclination: and Josephus, who is equally silent about the daughter of Herodias, pleasing Herod by her dancing, expressly assures us, that Herod, after he had imprisoned him, put him to death, because he was jealous of the great influence his character and preaching had upon the people, and because he thought it easier and more prudent, by his death to prevent any insurrection upon his account, than to inflict

the same punishment on him, after a tumult might be begun.

In chapter xv. verse 11, we have the following curious piece of instruction addressed to the multitude: "Not that which goeth "into the mouth defileth a man; but that "which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth "a man:" and at v. 15. this is called a parable. Surely this writer did not consider what constitutes a parable, when he called it by that name; for here is no similitude nor allegorical allusion whatsoever, but a plain, didactic aphorism, so very perspicuous, that even the explanation of it, said to be given to the disciples, at the request of Peter, in the 17th and following verses, is not in any degree more intelligible, though much more absurd: for, with what propriety can *evil thoughts, murders, and thefts*, be said to *proceed out of the mouth?* Indeed, to say that any thing which proceeds out of the mouth, or even out of the heart of man, defileth him, is as absurd as it were to say, that the turbid stream, which flows from a polluted fountain, defileth the fountain. According to Luke, our Saviour, on the contrary, with much more reason and propriety, taught both his disciples and the multitude, c. vi. v. 45, that "a good

" man, out of the good treasure of his heart, " bringeth forth that which is good; and an " evil man, out of the evil treasure of his " heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for " out of the abundance of the heart his mouth " speaketh." We cannot wonder, however, that this writer should be found inconsistent with Luke, when he even palpably contradicts himself. We have seen above, that, in the sermon on the mount, he makes our Lord expressly declare, that he was not come to destroy *one jot or one tittle* of the Law of Moses. Yet that Law prohibited many unclean meats, the eating of which certainly defiled any member of that covenant: to teach, therefore, that nothing which a man eat defiled him, was at once to destroy a very considerable part of that Law, for the observance of which, Peter himself, notwithstanding this pretended early instruction to the contrary, was zealous, long after his Master's ascension, as appears from his vision in the matter of Cornelius, and of which every Jew, to this day, is particularly tenacious.

The author, chapter 18, has introduced another parable of his own composition, the obvious scope of which is an exceeding good one, viz. the enforcing the Christian doctrine

of mutual forgiveness: but he has been very far from attaining that happy propriety of figurative expression and character, which so strikingly distinguishes all the parables of our Saviour recorded by Luke. It begins with a repetition of his former solecism, the likening the kingdom to the king; and here *the kingdom of heaven*, instead of meaning what *the kingdom of God* always means in Luke, has a new signification, different even from any which he himself has before assigned to it; for it represents the government of the divine providence over the affairs of men: but in his endeavours to inculcate the necessity of the duty he intended to teach, he has entirely lost sight of justice and honour, in the conduct of his parabolic king. Had he represented him, as the Lord's Prayer represents the Almighty to us, forgiving his offending subject, on condition that he forgave his fellow subjects, the conclusion of the parable had been consistent both with propriety and equity; but after an absolute, unconditional forgiveness once granted, to recant that pardon, and enforce the payment of his debt by the severest penalties, because the man did not shew similar mercy to his own debtor, is downright tyranny and injustice. Let us sup-

pose, that a subject had on some occasion aimed a stroke with his sword at an earthly sovereign, and that, with uncommon magnanimity and mercy, moved by his submission and apparent penitence, the sovereign had granted him a full and free pardon; and that, on his return from the palace, he received a blow himself from one of his fellow subjects, against whom he immediately instituted a prosecution in the courts of justice, that the offender might be legally punished for the assault; in such a case, could the sovereign, with any shadow of equity or honour, break his own word, and cause the man to be apprehended, tried and executed for that high treason, which he had already pardoned? Yet such and so unjustifiable is the conduct attributed to the king in this parable!

In chap. xix. v. 12, the author, very inadvertently, puts into the mouth of our Saviour an expression, which plainly betrays the age in which this spurious Gospel was written, and the particular sect of apostate Christians, which he himself favoured; for in reply to a remark of the disciples, upon a pretended condemnation of the divorces allowed by the Mosaic Law, our Lord is made to say, that "there are some eunuchs, which were so born

"from their mother's womb; and there are "some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs "of men; and there be eunuchs, which *have* "*made themselves* eunuchs, *for the kingdom of* "*heaven's sake*." Now the prophetic marks of the predicted antichristian apostasy given us by Paul, 1 Tim. c. iv. 2 and 3, are first, that its authors would *speak lies in hypocrisy, having a seared conscience* (a character, as far as I am able to judge, strongly and strikingly exemplified in this writer); and secondly, that they would *forbid marriage*, and *abstain from meats*: in conformity to the last distinguishing character of this early apostasy, this author, as I have before observed, in contradiction, not only to what Luke, but to what he himself elsewhere relates, as our Saviour's doctrine, makes him give directions for fasting; and, on another occasion, to say, that even the miraculous power of God, in curing some kind of Demoniacs, could not be efficaciously exerted "without prayer and *fast*-"*ing*," on the part of the Almighty's agent; and here he clearly discovers to us the second of these prophetic marks, pre-noticed by Paul, by making our Saviour approve of a determined, unnatural abstinence from marriage, for *the kingdom of heaven's sake*. These

were the peculiar doctrines of the Encratites or Continentes, a sect which appeared very early in the second century, and amongst whom it is not improbable, that the same madness of superstitious enthusiasm, which soon after led men into hermitages, monasteries, and even to stand for a great length of time in an erect posture on the top of a pillar, might have produced some instances of the unnatural self-violence the author speaks of, not long after the rise of that sect, the very allusion to which convicts him of being a writer later than those instances, that is, not earlier than near the middle of the second century; but it is absolutely impossible that in our Saviour's time, almost as soon as the New Covenant of the kingdom of God was begun to be preached, and even before his disciples comprehended its nature and intent, any men could have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of it. In the latter half of the second, and within the third century, indeed, such numerous instances occurred in consequence of the approbation of our Saviour himself, supposed to be given in this spurious Gospel, which had been received as the Apostle Matthew's, that early in the fourth century, the first Council of Nice, in conformity to

the Mosaic Law* which forbad any Man, that had a blemish or defect, from performing the office of a priest, decreed that no man, who had castrated himself, should be admitted into, or retained in any clerical office: though the same Council evinced their attachment to the principles and doctrines of the Encratites, by decreeing, at the same time, that no man of the clerical order should be allowed to marry. It should be observed also, that in the introduction to this curious discourse, the writer again betrays the grossest ignorance of the geography of the country; for he says, it passed when our Saviour "leaving Galilee, came into the coasts of "Judea *beyond Jordan;*" though the Jordan was the eastern boundary of both the Jewish and Roman province of Judea, and consequently no part of it was *beyond* the *Jordan.*

V. The twentieth chapter begins with another parable peculiar to this author, who, with his usual incongruity of figurative language, here resembles *the kingdom of heaven* to an householder hiring labourers into his vineyard, at different hours of the day, and in the evening, paying those who were hired

* Lev. xxi. 17—24.

early in the morning, the stipulated, customary price of their day's labour, and generously giving the very same sum to all those who were hired later, or even to such as had worked only a single hour. But if, by working in the vineyard, is meant men's performing the moral duties of the Gospel; and by their payment in the evening, is to be understood, the rewards of that future life, which God has promised to all faithful and true Christians; there is not the least resemblance of any kind between the circumstances of the Gospel Covenant and those of the bargain made with the labourers in the parable: for ever since the Gospel has been preached to the world, wheresoever it is known, the labourers in the Christian vineyard are invited all together to enter into it; and the same covenanted terms are proposed to all, without any partial choice or predilection, viz. an eternal life of happiness in heaven. Now in this parable, though the labourers, who had wrought the entire day, having received the bare payment they had earned, had certainly no right to complain of injustice in the householder, nor to controul his generosity towards the others, in giving them more than they had earned; yet surely they

must feel the great difference between his mere justice to themselves, and his extraordinary liberality to those who had wrought but one hour; and we cannot wonder that they murmured at so seemingly unreasonable a preference and partiality, in the distribution of his bounty. But the eternity of happiness, promised us in the Gospel, is so transcendent a recompense that, in comparison of it, the difference between the longest and the shortest life of man becomes perfectly evanescent; we are all, therefore, taught to consider ourselves as *unprofitable*, that is, unmeriting servants, who, in constantly doing our utmost, can barely do our duty: and, instead of finding cause to murmur, the best of men must see reason for endless gratitude to the Deity, for the Gospel promises of such an infinite and undeserved portion of his beneficence.

The beginning of the twenty-first chapter contains the history of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, amidst the hosannas of the people, as predicted by the prophet Zechariah, "meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, "the foal of an ass;" but this writer was so ignorant of the usual pleonasm and redundancy of the Hebrew idiom, that, misunder-

standing the prophet, who only means to say, that the promised king would come riding on an ass, and that the ass he should ride on, would be a young one, or an ass's colt, he supposes him to predict his riding upon two asses; and therefore, to shew that the prophecy was more literally accomplished than Luke's history had shewn it to be, he informs us, our Lord sent two of his disciples to fetch an ass and a colt with her: that "they "brought the ass and the colt, and put on "*them* their clothes, and they set him upon "*them*." In what position either the writer himself, or those who, for so many centuries, have believed him to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, conceived our Saviour to have been seated on two animals at a time, I pretend not to determine; but surely, a more glaring instance of the gross ignorance of the one, respecting the Jewish prophecies, and of the extreme credulity of the others, need not be produced!!

At the twenty-eighth verse of this chapter, there is a kind of an attempt at another parable; but whether working in the vineyard means becoming Christians, or living righteously under any religious institution; why publicans and harlots are styled the eldest

son of the master of the vineyard, and the chief priests and elders of the Jews, his younger son; whether the repentance and righteousness preached by John the Baptist, or the Gospel of Christ, be here meant by *the kingdom of God;* and upon what authority, *harlots* are mentioned as particularly flocking to John's baptism; does not appear from the parable itself, at least, it is not in my power to discover.

The following parable, verse 33, with some trifling alterations in the expression, is taken entirely from Luke, and is very perspicuous and intelligible; but, towards the close of it, Luke represents our Saviour, as asking, "what, therefore, shall the Lord of the vine-"yard do unto them?" and supplying the answer himself in these words, "He shall come "and destroy these husbandmen, and shall "give the vineyard to others:" whereas, this writer tells us, the chief Priests and Pharisees answered his question, in words nearly to the same purpose, in direct contradiction to Luke, who assures us, they were so far from denouncing such a judgment against themselves, that, when they heard our Saviour utter it, they exclaimed, God forbid!

The twenty-second chapter begins with another remarkable parable, the idea of which is evidently borrowed from one of Luke's; but the time, place, language, circumstances, and general scope of the whole, are so altered, that it may, with reason, pass for the author's own. In Luke, c. 14, the parable is merely prophetic of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, in consequence of the chief persons of the Jewish nation refusing to receive it, from an interested attachment to, what they thought, their temporal welfare, an event which took place before the destruction of Jerusalem; and, therefore, the poor and lower classes of the Jews, whereof our Lord's first disciples mostly consisted, are represented by the indigent and distressed frequenters of the streets and lanes of the Jewish city, and the Gentiles, by those who were found about the highways and hedges: but this author, who, I have no doubt, wrote long after the destruction of Jerusalem, makes the invitation of the Gentiles, to accept the Gospel Covenant, posterior to that calamity. The parable, therefore, in the first seven verses, refers only to the preaching the New Covenant to the Jews; describes their cruel

persecution of the Apostles and the first preachers of the Gospel, and the vengeance inflicted on them by heaven, in the utter ruin of their city and nation; *after which*, the messengers of the Gospel are ordered to go and preach it to the Gentiles. The manner, however, in which that is done in the parable, shews that the writer did not live in the age of Matthew, but at a time, when Christianity was, with great numbers, a mere external profession, and the state of the Church so corrupt, that the majority of its members were bad men; for he tells us, the king's servants furnished the wedding with guests, by collecting together "as many as they found, "*both bad and good.*" This is a pretty accurate description of the state of *professed* Christianity, as it is at present, and as I am well convinced it was in the age of this writer, and has been ever since; but nothing can be more unlike the state of the true Church of Christ, as it was founded by Matthew and the other Apostles; and as, where it subsists at all, it must for ever continue to be: for the Apostles and the first preachers of the Gospel were so far from admitting bad men into the Christian society, that Paul strictly enjoins the Gentile converts, 1 Cor.

c. v. v. 11, not to suffer any man, who was guilty of any of the vices prohibited in the Gospel, to remain a member of their community, nor to associate, nor even so much as to eat, with him. In the conclusion of the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, the author informs us, as the reason of the master's partiality, that though, under the Gospel Covenant, "many are called, yet few "are chosen;" and he repeats the same words at the end of this parable also: for, since he considered all the professed christians of his own time to be called, and was sensible that but few of them, in comparison of the whole number, were really virtuous, good men; and ignorantly supposed, that such would be the state of the Christian religion to the end of the world; it was natural for him to conclude, that those, whom God would finally approve at the day of judgment, would be very few indeed. But had he been an Apostle of Jesus Christ, or had he understood the Gospel meaning of *the kingdom of God*, or the sense of the old prophecies, respecting the state of the world under the New Covenant of the Messiah, he would have known, that no immoral, bad man could be a member of the true Church of Christ,

whatever his profession might be; and that, therefore, the whole congregation of faithful Christians are denominated the chosen or elect of God; and, instead of their being found to be few at the day of general judgment and retribution, he would have known also, that the very end and design of the religion of Jesus Christ, is *to bless all the families of the earth*, with the happy effects of its moral influence in the present life; and that, when the marriage of the king's son really takes place, righteousness will overspread the earth, as completely as *the waters cover the* sea. With respect to the guest, who *had not on a wedding garment*, whatever the author meant by that figurative expression, though the man, it seems, had nothing to say for himself, one cannot help pitying him: because, from the circumstances of the parable, he appears to have been, in a manner, *pressed* to attend at the marriage feast; and, if any particular robe was necessary, since the king's servants must see that he had none, they ought either to have supplied him with one, or not to have invited him at all: and it seems rather hard, that, in consequence of their inattention or neglect, the unhappy wretch should be *bound hand and*

foot, and thrown into outer darkness, there to remain *weeping and gnashing his teeth.*

VI. At the close of the twenty-third chapter, we meet with a very remarkable instance of this writer's ignorance of, and astonishing inattention to, the meaning of Luke's history, though he has made so free and copious an use of it in patching up his own. The reader will recollect, that, in the thirteenth chapter of Luke, our Saviour is represented, whilst he was yet in Galilee, as breaking out into a beautiful, pathetic ejaculation, upon the foresight of his own death, and the consequent destruction of the city of Jerusalem; and, though he was urged to hasten out of Herod's jurisdiction, saying, he should still stay a few days longer in Galilee, and predicting that the people of Jerusalem should not see him, till they were prepared to receive him with exclamations of "Blessed is he that cometh "in the name of the Lord;" a prediction which, we have seen, was literally fulfilled, at his entering Jerusalem upon a young ass, as the prophet Zechariah had foretold. But this writer having already, in his own extraordinary manner, related the accomplishment of that prophecy, in the twenty-first

chapter, here, when our Lord is actually teaching at Jerusalem, in the temple, not only makes him utter the same tender apostrophe to that city, but makes him also add the same prediction of the people's hosannas, at his entry into Jerusalem, after it had been fulfilled, "For I say unto you, ye shall not "see me *henceforth*, till ye shall say, Blessed "is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." What meaning the writer could intend to convey by these words, I cannot imagine; because such a prediction, given at the date which he has assigned to it, even according to his own history, was not completed, and was, therefore, absolutely false: for, in the very next chapter, he informs us, that, as soon as our Saviour had so said, he left the temple, and went out of the city, to the Mount of Olives, from thence to Bethany, where he was a guest to Simon the Leper; and though he returned again to Jerusalem to eat the Passover, and was seen by the whole city, during his examination before the council, and before Pontius Pilate, and at his crucifixion, yet no such circumstance, as is here predicted, is so much as said to have taken place.

The twenty-fifth chapter contains two more parables, the first entirely this author's, in which *the kingdom of heaven* is compared to *ten virgins*, half of them prudent, and careful to be always prepared for the expected coming of the bridegroom; and the other half improvident, and unprepared for his sudden appearance. Here again we have a just representation of the state of mankind in general, under every other system of religion; but not at all suited to the circumstances, that are predicted of the world under the Gospel Covenant, when it is become *the kingdom of God*. This parable, therefore, is another proof that the writer either did not comprehend, or, at least, did not believe, the universal, moral reformation of that prophetic state of man in the present life; and, consequently, that he was not an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

The next is the parable of the talents, which is evidently an imitation, though a very aukward and faulty one, of Luke's parable of the ten pounds. In the latter, our Saviour is represented as distributing the advantages of light and knowledge displayed in his Gospel, in the same equal proportion, to all his followers of every rank and degree, as

is strictly the case; because his precepts and religious instructions are equally intelligible to all; but, since the natural powers and abilities of men are very different, his servants are described, as making different degrees of improvement of those equal advantages, except one, who, corresponding to those persons, who, having been instructed in the religion of Jesus Christ reject it, as the unwarranted imposture of an artful, unjust man, refused to make any use of them at all.* The pretended Matthew, on the contrary, makes him distribute his talents in the most partial, unequal manner—one only to one of his followers, twice as many to another, and five times as many to a third, as he himself expresses it, "to every man *according to his* "*abilities;*" as if the religious instruction of

* It should be remarked, that the word *napkin*, used in this servant's answer, in our copies of Luke's Gospel, is a Latin word, written in Greek characters; but that it cannot be the word originally used by Luke himself, is manifest from the obvious sense of the sentence, and the participle annexed to the substantive napkin, which is not wrapped or tied up, but *laid up*; for the servant means to tell his Lord, that he has kept the pound deposited in a place of security, that he might be sure of receiving his own, when he returned, though nothing more; accordingly, in this parable attributed to Matthew, he is said to have concealed the money under ground; but a napkin is no place of security to lay up money in; and therefore, the deficiency of the original word in the earliest copies of Luke, has undoubtedly been capriciously supplied, by some unskilful copiest of the second century.

that Gospel, so peculiarly preached to the poorest and most illiterate, was not equally intelligible to men of all capacities and degrees.

The latter part of this chapter is a description of the day of judgment, and expressly teaches, not only that the righteous will then be rewarded with eternal life in heaven, but also, that the wicked will suffer *everlasting* punishment. There is such palpable injustice ascribed to the righteous Lord of heaven and earth, by all those who represent him as inflicting infinite punishment for the definite, momentary offences of finite creatures, that such a doctrine would make me strongly suspect the authenticity of any scripture in which I found it; and it is with great satisfaction I can remark, that this doctrine is peculiar to this spurious Evangelical history, and as repugnant to the positive declaration of the other scriptures of the New Testament, as it is to strict justice and the voice of reason; for they assure us, that, not an endless life of torment, but utter destruction and a *second death* await* the unreformed wicked.

The history of our Saviour's eating the Paschal lamb with his Apostles, and of the in-

* See 2 Thess. i. 9.—Apoc. xx. 6.

stitution of the Lord's supper, is contained in the twenty-sixth chapter; but attended with so many different and contradictory circumstances, that it is absolutely irreconcilable to Luke's history of the same things. For Luke informs us, that, according to the universal practice of the Jews in celebrating the Passover, our Lord began with taking a cup of wine, which, after thanking God for the mercies recorded in that festival, he handed round to the Apostles, with an apology for his own non-observance of the custom of drinking of it first himself, as every master of a family did on the same occasion; that next, as was customary also, he took a loaf of bread, and, having offered up the usual thanksgiving to God, brake the bread, and distributed of it to each of them, bidding them consider that bread as an emblem of his body, which was given for them, and to observe a similar ceremony amongst themselves in *remembrance* of him; that he then partook with them of the Paschal supper; and that, after supper, he distributed to them in the same manner, the grace-cup, with which that festive meal was always closed, bidding them to consider the wine also as an emblem of his blood, which was about to be

shed, to ratify the New Covenant, which God now made with them; that, immediately after, as if it were by way of contrast to that affectionate, grateful remembrance of him, which he had just enjoined them practically to retain, he exclaimed, "But, be- "hold, the hand of him that betrayeth me, "is with me on the table:" that so extraordinary a declaration set them to enquire *amongst themselves*, which of them could be meant: as the annunciation of his approaching death made them contend, which of them should be accounted their chieftain after that event; that, to put an end to a strife so unbecoming the spirit of his unassuming religion, he told them, no one of his disciples, as such, should arrogate a superiority over his Christian brethren; and that they were to expect no other authority or pre-eminence, besides what they were destined to partake of, in some degree with himself, after their death, at the final, complete establishment of his kingdom, or *the kingdom of God*, upon earth: but, according to Luke, he did not interpose one word to settle their doubts about the person of the traitor. The writer, called Matthew, on the contrary, who, instead of being a Jew himself, appears to have been very

imperfectly acquainted with either the prophecies or customs of the Jews, takes not the least notice of the cup preceding the supper, and in telling us that the apology for his own not drinking of the wine, was made by Jesus at the grace-cup, when he ordained the ceremony of the Lord's supper, he really betrays his own ignorance, by teaching us that he did not begin the feast, as was customary, with the cup; for if he did, and the apology for his not drinking of it himself was given then, there could be no propriety in his repeating it so soon after, at the grace-cup; especially when we consider, that the latter was proposed to them, as a commencement of that commemorative rite of which he was to be the object, not the partaker: whereas, the participation of the cup before the supper was the common form of beginning the Paschal feast, which, as a Jew, concerned him as much as his disciples. In contradiction also to Luke, who tells us, that what was said of the traitor, was said after the supper was ended, and the commemorative observance instituted—and plainly intimates, that he did not explain whom he meant—this writer informs us, that it passed whilst they were eating the supper, and, what is singularly un-

accountable, even before the breaking and distributing the unleavened bread; and says, that every one of the Apostles asked him, whether it was he, and upon Judas's asking him the same question, he declared before them all, that he was the person; yet he immediately proceeded to institute, what we call, the Lord's supper, and enjoined it upon Judas equally with the rest. One of these two histories, therefore, must be false; and which it is, another very remarkable difference, concerning the express terms, in which that part of the Lord's supper that regards the wine, was instituted, will perhaps help us to determine; for this author tells us, our Lord's words were, "This is my blood of "the New Covenant, which is shed for many, "*for the remission of sins;*" words which have proved the source of that fatal inefficacy of the moral influence of the Gospel, occasioned by representing the death of Jesus as a propitiatory sacrifice, and a satisfactory atonement for the sins of the whole world; whereas, Luke mentions nothing of the remission of sins; but says, his words were, "This cup is the New Covenant in my "blood, which is shed for you." And that Luke's account is the true one, we have the

most convincing evidence from Paul, who, 1 Cor. c. xi. v. 25, assures us, that he received the account of this institution from our blessed Saviour himself; and that his words were, as Luke has recorded them, "This cup is the New Covenant in my "blood," without one syllable of *the remission of sins.*

VII. From hence, to the conclusion of this Gospel, the differences and contradictions, between this writer and Luke, are so numerous and so great, that it appears astonishing, notwithstanding Paul's early prediction to the Thessalonians, that so it would be, that the inhabitants of Christendom, of every intellectual degree, should, for so many centuries, have received, for the word of truth itself, the most gross and palpable falsehood, which, of two contradictory histories, one of them must certainly be. But it is well worth our while to consider, with all our attention, that Paul tells us, that, even under the influence of this predicted, *strong delusion*, men would stand condemned in the sight of God; because the real, though unavowed reason of their rejecting truth for fables and fictitious falsehood, has been their *taking pleasure in*

unrighteousness. Now that the doctrine of Christ's death being a full satisfaction to the divine justice, for all the sins and unrighteousness of men, which is founded principally upon this fabulous and spurious Gospel called Matthew's, is particularly alluded to, by the Christian prophet, in this prediction, I have no doubt: and that this hath always been the grand inducement, with the members of the orthodox Church of Constantine, next to the compulsion and temporal allurements of the civil magistrate, to attach them to its fabulous, idolatrous superstition, is evident from the testimony even of her present most zealous champions, bishops, and other grave divines, who, to disparage those modern preachers of the Gospel, (who, ceasing to blaspheme the Almighty Creator of the universe, by a communication of his Godhead and divine honours to a mortal man, have rejected also this doctrine of an universal asylum for sin and wickedness) tell us, that the religion which they preach is an *uncomfortable religion.* Uncomfortable! Are these right reverend and roverend personages then unacquainted with the heart-felt comfort of a life duly regulated by the moral precepts of the Gospel of Christ? Are the conscious expe-

rience, except in very extraordinary cases, of the continual blessing of God in this life, and the certainty of enjoying after death, immortality and happiness in a future life, no comforts? Or, are these to be accounted of no value, unless the orthodox doctrine of atonement afford men the additional *comfort* of being able, securely to lead lives inconsistent with Christian righteousness, and to attain the rewards of the next life, through the unwarrantable gratifications of their passions and sensual appetites in this? Such divines, howsoever eminent in worldly dignity or learning, may teach what they please; but they, and their flocks too, will find, at last, that under the Christian, as well as the Mosaic Covenant, *there is no comfort, saith God, to the unrighteous.*

Luke informs us, that, after the supper was ended, a very serious, important conversation took place, between our Saviour and his Apostles, upon several subjects suited to the occasion, in the course of which he predicted Peter's thrice denying that he knew him; and that, after this, he went out of Jerusalem, to his lodging at the Mount of Olives, *as usual.* This writer, on the contrary, informs us, that "when they had sung

"an hymn," after supper, "they went out "into the Mount of Olives," and that there he predicted not only Peter's denial of him, but that all his Apostles should that night *be offended because of him*; of the verification of which there is not the smallest degree of evidence. He makes our Lord declare also, that, after he is risen, *he will go before them into Galilee*, though Luke assures us, that after his resurrection, he appeared to them all at Jerusalem; that he there daily conversed with them till his ascension; that, by his express command, they continued at Jerusalem, from the Passover to the feast of Pentecost: and that the Apostles abode there long after.

In Luke too, our Lord is represented, as from his station and character we might expect him to be, perfectly collected and undisturbed, (for the two verses, recording his agony and the vision of an angel strengthening him, are known to be an interpolation, because they are not found in the oldest and best copies of Luke) introducing into his nightly devotions, a single petition to God, to remove that cup from him, if it was his will; but immediately resigning himself, with the most calm and dutiful submission, to

the accomplishment of the divine will, in preference to his own inclination. The writer before us, on the contrary, represents him as greatly afflicted, and *exceeding sorrowful*, at the approach of his expected death, soliciting heaven with prayers, repeated three different times, that, *if possible*, that cup might *pass from him*; and, after the offering up his reiterated prayers, so very confused and discomposed, as to address his sleepy Apostles in the following incoherent, irrational language: "*Sleep on now and take your rest*, "behold the hour is at hand, and the son of "man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. "*Rise, let us be going;* behold he is at hand "that doth betray me."

Luke tells us, as is most probable, that those who apprehended our Lord detained him all night in custody in the hall of the High Priest's palace; and that Peter sat down in the hall amongst them; that after his fear had thrice induced him, *simply* to deny his acquaintance, and connexion with Jesus, upon the cock's crowing, our Lord turned and looked upon him, which, making him immediately recollect what had before passed upon that subject, affected him so much that he was forced to go out, in order to give the na-

tural vent to his sorrow; that "*as soon as it* "*was day*, the elders of the people, and the "chief priests, and the scribes, came together, "and led him into their council;" that, there he answered every question put to him, as he did afterwards before Pontius Pilate, to whom they carried him, as soon as they had drawn from him the ground of their accusation of him to the Romans, a declaration that he was the object of the prophecies respecting *the Christ*, or anointed king of the Jewish nation, which they strove to construe into a rebellion against Cæsar; and the words in which he made that declaration, Luke says, were, "from this time forth" (not hereafter, as our translation hath it) "shall the son of "man sit on the right hand of the power of "God;" intimating, as he did on several other occasions, that it was not till after his death that he should be invested with the glorious character of the Christ. The pretended Matthew, on the other hand, informs us, that the apprehenders of our Lord led him directly "to Caiaphas the High Priest, where," at that late hour of the night, the whole Jewish council "was assembled" to receive witnesses against him, that they might "put him to "death." That here, as also afterwards be-

fore Pilate, he persisted in an indecent, sullen silence, till the High Priest adjured him, *by the living God*, to say, whether he was the predicted Christ, or not; that then he acknowledged he was, and added, "nevertheless, from this time forth, *shall ye see* the son "of man sitting on the right hand of power, "and coming in the clouds of heaven:" a prediction absolutely false, because the Jewish nation, from that time to this, have never *seen* any such thing, but still remain incredulous to his being the promised Christ. Upon his speaking thus, however, the author makes the High Priest rend his clothes, through indignation at the *blasphemy* of the speech, which I believe no man else can discover in it; and tells us, the members of the council, after pronouncing him guilty of death, amused themselves till morning, in putting on him all sorts of contemptuous, ludicrous, and wanton indignities and abuse; and that then, having consulted together in what manner he should be put to death, "they bound him, and led "him away, and delivered him to Pontius "Pilate the Governor;" that, in the mean while, Peter was not admitted into the council chamber, as we may easily suppose, but as "he sat without in the palace," where it

was impossible for our Lord to look upon him, as Luke assures us he did, three different persons successively challenged him as being a follower of Jesus; and that he was not contented with barely denying any knowledge of his master, but accompanied his denial with oaths and imprecations, as unworthy the character of one chosen to be an Apostle, as they are contradictory to the account given us by Luke.

In the beginning of the twenty-seventh chapter, the author informs us, that when Judas saw that the Jewish council had condemned our Lord to die, (though he must have known from the first, when he covenanted with them to betray him into their hands, that they could have no other intent,) he repented, brought again the price of his treachery, threw the money down in the temple, and *went and hanged himself*; and that the priests did not put the money into the treasury of the temple, because it was the price of blood; but purchased with it the potter's field, to bury strangers in, which, says the author, "was called the field of blood "*unto this day*;" an expression denoting that a long interval of time had elapsed between that event and the date of his history, not

eight or nine years only, the period at which Matthew is said to have written. Hereby, he tells us, they accomplished a prophecy of Jeremiah; but, like the prophecy of the Messiah's being called a Nazarene, quoted in the second chapter, it is no where to be found in Jeremiah, nor in the writings of any other prophet of the Old Testament. Luke, on the contrary, in the first chapter of the Acts, assures us, that Judas, far from repenting and restoring the money he had received, having traiterously abandoned his apostleship, that he might go to a place peculiarly his own, purchased some land with the reward of his iniquity; and that he was afterwards killed upon the land he had bought by the violence of a fall, which was so great as to force out his very bowels; that the circumstance was well known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who from thence, or on account of the nature of the purchase money, or perhaps from both together, denominated it *the field of blood*. It is not possible to draw up two stories of the same thing more directly contradictory to each other than these two; one of them, therefore, must necessarily be a fiction, and a shameful falsehood. Let the reader judge to which author the imputation most

justly belongs. From a Note of the late learned Bishop of Rochester, upon this passage in the Acts, it appears, that the irreconcilable contradiction of these two accounts struck him so forcibly, that he infers from it, as well as from *other circumstances*, which he does not specify, but which are sufficiently obvious to an attentive and unprejudiced reader, that Matthew's Gospel was not written till after the publication of both the histories of Luke; and his inference is certainly just: for since Luke professes to write of every thing as it had been delivered to them by the apostles, he never could have so flatly contradicted the written account of an apostle. But if this Gospel of Matthew was published later than the fifth or sixth year of Nero's reign, as it must have been, to make it posterior to Luke's second history, the testimony of all the early writers, who inform us it was prior to Luke's Gospel, must be false; and not the slightest evidence of any kind remains, that Matthew ever wrote an Evangelical History. Besides, as Luke, we have seen, lived with Matthew and all the other apostles at Jerusalem; and, on account of the election of Matthias to supply his place, the story of Judas, must have been often mentioned amongst them, he could

not be ignorant of the circumstances with which Matthew himself related the story; and it is equally improbable that he should contradict his oral as his written account of this transaction; at the same time, no man can suppose, that an apostle of Jesus Christ, or any other person, who had the least regard to truth, or to his own character, could deliver a verbal account of any fact to Luke and the other disciples, in one manner, and, in writing afterwards, relate the same fact in another, utterly inconsistent with it.

I omit to animadvert upon the dream and extraordinary interference of Pilate's wife; as also upon the improbability of the Governor's washing his hands before the multitude, to cleanse himself from the guilt of the *innocent blood* of a *just person*, which he was going to shed; and upon the horrid imprecation of the people upon themselves and their posterity, which are all peculiar to this writer. But I cannot forbear remarking, that as Pilate was convinced of our Lord's innocence and inoffensive behaviour, and sacrificed him to the clamorous entreaties of the Jews, against his own judgement and inclination, it is not at all consistent with the polished humanity of the Romans, that he should have subjected him

to any unnecessary, barbarous, and cruelly insulting treatment from the Roman soldiers; that, according to Luke, the gorgeous robe and contemptuous mockings were put upon him, not by them, but by Herod; and that *his* history of the crucifixion makes no mention of the crown of thorns, nor of the other wanton indignities attributed to the Roman soldiers by this writer.

At verse 44, we are told, that both the thieves joined with the people in taunting him when on the cross; whereas Luke assures us, that one of them only did so; and that he was reproved for it by the other malefactor.

In verse 46, &c. we read, that, when he had hung three hours upon the cross, our Lord exclaimed, "my God, my God, why "hast thou forsaken me?" and, when he had exclaimed a second time, expired. Luke, on the contrary, is so far from making him utter any thing that could lead the people to think, or that might appear as if he himself thought, he was in any sense forsaken by Almighty God, that he tells us, at the ninth hour, "he cried with a loud voice, and said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spi-"rit; and having said thus, died."

They both mention, that the vail of the temple was rent: but this author alone informs us of the earthquake that rent the rocks and opened the graves; and that many bodies of the dead saints arose, and, taking advantage of the aperture, "came out of the "graves after his resurrection," (what they did in the interval is not mentioned,) "and "went into the holy city, and appeared unto "many." Surely this story is well worthy of those spurious legends of the beginning of the second century, which, Irenæus tells us, were calculated to astonish the credulous and superstitious! For who can be meant by the saints? That was an appellation commonly given to the Christians in after times; but at the time of our Lord's crucifixion it was applied to no particular set of people. And what became of these bodies of the saints after they came into the city? Had they joined the society of our Lord's disciples, we should have heard of them in the Acts; but perhaps the author meant we should understand that, after just exhibiting so extraordinary an appearance, they returned quietly unnoticed, every one to his own narrow sepulchral cell; and there let us leave them undisturbed.

Luke informs us, that "when the Centu-"rion saw what was done" at our Saviour's expiration, he said, "certainly this was a "righteous man." But this writer tells us, that he and those who were with him said, "truly this was the" (or rather a) "son of "God." In what sense a Roman Centurion could use the latter expression, and which denomination it is most probable he should make use of, I submit to the reader's determination.

According to Luke, as soon as Jesus was dead, Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate, and begged his body; and hasted to bury it, because the sabbath, which began at sun-set, drew on; that his female disciples attended the burial, observed how his body was placed in the sepulchre, and returned and prepared spices and ointments to embalm it with, before the sabbath commenced; and then rested the sabbath day, according to the commandment. The pretended Matthew, however, tells us, that "*when even was come*," that is, when the sabbath was actually begun, Joseph went to beg the body, took it down, wrapped it in linen, and buried it; and that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting over

against the sepulchre. From the time this writer has thought fit to allot for the burial of our Saviour, it is evident that he was not only no Jew himself, but so ignorant of the customs of the Jews, that he did not know their day always began with the evening; or he could never have employed Joseph in doing what no Jew would, nor dared to have done, after the commencement of the sabbath. He takes no notice at all of the preparation made by the women to embalm the body; for that would not have agreed with the sequel of his truly wonderful story; but, to make up for that omission, he informs us of a circumstance, with which Luke's history shews us *he* was perfectly unacquainted: for he tells us, that "the next day that followed "the day of the preparation"—such is the periphrasis that he uses for the sabbath day! It is well known, that amongst the Jews, it was customary to prepare and set out, in the afternoon of the Friday, all the food and necessaries for every family, during the sabbath day, because they were forbid to light a fire, or to do any the most trivial servile work, on that day, and therefore Friday was very properly called the day of preparation; but it appears to me next to impossible, that any Jew,

or any other person who had been accustomed to keep the sabbath as a religious ordinance, should call the sabbath *the day that followed the day of the preparation:* yet this singular historian so denominates it, and goes on to inform us, that the Chief Priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, to ask for a guard to be placed round the sepulchre till the third day, to prevent his disciples from stealing away his body, and then saying he was risen from the dead; and that, after obtaining the Governor's permission, they went and secured the sepulchre, by sealing the stone that was rolled against it, and setting a watch. Here it is wonderful, that the Jewish rulers should, in so public a manner, thus violate the precept for observing the sabbath day; more wonderful, that they should have so much better attended to and comprehended the meaning of our Lord's prediction of his rising to life again, than any of his own disciples did; and most wonderful, that a Roman Proconsul should consent to let his troops keep watch round a tomb, for fear it should be thought that a dead man was come to life again. But though our author's history of these extraordinary facts is neither consistent with reason and probability, nor with any other history

of the same event, it proceeds in pretty strict conformity to the manner in which it sets out; for, to convince us still more fully that the author was totally ignorant of the mode of computing time, in use amongst the Jews, and habituated to that used by the Greeks and Romans, he reckons the sabbath to last till day-light on the Sunday morning, and says, c. 28, that, "in the end of the sabbath, as it "began to dawn toward the first day of the "week," the two Marys, before mentioned, came, not, as according to Luke, to embalm the body, for, with a guard round the sepulchre, that must have been impracticable, but *to see the sepulchre.* Whilst they were there, the author tells us, there was another great earthquake, and an angel descended, rolled away the stone, and sat upon it; at whose sight, the soldiers trembled and were frighted to death; but to prevent the like effect of his appearance upon the women, he said unto them, "fear not *ye*, for I know that ye seek "Jesus who was crucified." That the women, as well as the soldiers, were present at the descent of this angel, appears, not only from there being nobody else, by whom these uncommon circumstances could have been related, but also by the pronoun personal *ye*,

inserted in the original Greek, which in that language is never done, unless it be emphatically to mark such a distinction or antithesis, as there was, on this occasion, between them and the Roman guard. Here, however, the author is, inadvertently, inconsistent with himself, as well as with every other historian, agreeably to the vulgar proverb of our own country; and, forgetting that the sole intent of rolling away the stone, was to open a passage absolutely necessary for our Lord's body to come forth out of the sepulchre, and that, if he had risen after the angel had rolled it away, both the women and the soldiers must have seen him rise, he makes the angel bid them look into the sepulchre to see he was not there, and tell them, that he was already risen; that they should inform his disciples of it; and that he was going *before them into Galilee*, where *they should see him*. In their way, the author adds, Jesus himself met the women, and said, "*be* "*not afraid;* go, tell my brethren to go into "Galilee, and there shall they see me:" that the eleven Apostles accordingly went into Galilee to an appointed mountain, and not only saw him there, but, contrary to what they ever did at any other time, either before or

after, they worshipped him, notwithstanding some of them were so incredulous, as not to believe even the testimony of their own senses. In the interim, whilst the women were going to the Apostles, the author tells us, "*some* of the watch," some strictly disciplined Roman soldiers, left their station, to bring an account of what had passed, not to the Governor their General, nor to any other of their own officers, but to the Chief Priests of the Jews; that they assembled a council of the Elders upon the occasion, and, after deliberating what was to be done, induced the soldiers, by large bribes, to run the risk of being put to death themselves, upon the highly improbable chance of the Jewish rulers having influence sufficient, with a Roman Proconsul, to prevail on him, to submit to the indelible infamy of neglecting the discipline of the army under his command, to such a degree, as to suffer an entire guard of soldiers avowedly to sleep upon their station, without any notice being taken of it, and to say, that our Lord's disciples stole his body away, whilst they slept. This incredible story is another instance how necessary it is, that those, who do not adhere closely to the truth, should have extraordinary good memo-

ries, to enable them to keep clear of gross absurdities, or palpable contradictions, in their narrations; for how were the tongues of these soldiers to be restrained, amongst the inquisitive inhabitants of a great city, at that time particularly crowded, on account of the Paschal feast, not only in their way to the Chief Priests, but also during the whole time whilst the Priests assembled the council, and deliberated with the Elders what was to be done? And if that part of the watch, who, the author says, came to inform the Jews, were poltroons enough, for the sake of a bribe, to undergo so shameful a disgrace to themselves, as well as to hazard the resentment of their General, how could they undertake that all their comrades, who remained at the sepulchre, would do the same? And to what purpose could the Jewish Council bribe *some*, without a possibility of knowing how the rest of the corps would act? And, even supposing all these difficulties surmounted, and that the whole guard had agreed and persisted in saying, that "his "disciples stole him away whilst they slept," of what service could that be to the Jewish rulers, except to demonstrate the folly of setting any guard at all? For, if the guards

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were asleep, they could be no evidence that his body was stolen away; and it must be just as probable, that he might rise to life again whilst the watch was asleep, as it was if no watch had been set. Our author subjoins, "And this saying is commonly reported "amongst the Jews, *until this day;*" another inadvertent slip, if he really meant to pass for Matthew, (of which, however, I must do him the justice to say, I see not the least proof;) for it evidently implies, that from these events to the time of the author, a long series of years had intervened: and, therefore, such an expression could not, at any time, have been used with propriety by Matthew, especially if he wrote his Gospel so early as is asserted. For my own part, from the number of Latin words written in Greek characters, which this book contains; from the author's evident ignorance of the customs, prophecies, and country of the Jews; from the form of baptism enjoined at the conclusion; from the Roman centurion being made to call our Saviour a *Son of God*, which words, in the mouth of a Pagan, could only mean, that he must be a Hero or Demigod, like Bacchus, Hercules, or Æsculapius; and from the women and all the Apostles being represented as

worshipping their Master, without any reason alleged, or even suggested, for their idolatry; I am perfectly convinced, that this Gospel was not written earlier than near the middle of the second century; and that it is the patched-work composition of some convert from the Pagan schools. Whether my arguments may work the same conviction upon any of my readers, is not for me to judge; but I am confident, that whoever impartially considers, that, according to Luke's histories, the Christians of the apostolic age did not baptize in the terms of the form here prescribed, but simply *in the name of the Lord Jesus;* that his disciples were so far from knowing a watch was set round the sepulchre, that the women came early on Sunday morning to embalm the body; and were perplexed at finding the stone rolled away, and that the body was not in the sepulchre; that a vision of two angels, in human shape, informed them he was risen, and reminded them, that it was only what he had foretold them must come to pass, long before they came to Jerusalem; that they gave them no orders to send the Apostles into Galilee to see him; on the contrary, that, though he did not appear to two of the women, as the pre-

tended Matthew asserts, yet he appeared that same day to Peter, *at Jerusalem;* to two other disciples, as they went to Emmaus; and, the succeeding night, to the whole congregation of the disciples, not *in Galilee*, but *at Jerusalem*; and that, by his express command, the Apostles did not go into Galilee, but remained at Jerusalem till the feast of Pentecost; cannot *rationally* believe both these contradictory histories, and consequently he must be satisfied that one of them is grossly fabulous and false.

VIII. In reviewing the miracles of Jesus recorded by this writer, we find most of them, like those of Luke, works of mercy and benevolence; only he relates more of them; and, with a view, no doubt, to aggrandize the miracle, it is observable that he frequently doubles the object or the malady to be healed, making two where Luke mentions but one; or making the demoniac, that Luke tells us was dumb, both blind and dumb also. But there are a few of a very different kind related by this author, of which Luke makes not the least mention; those are, c. xiv. our Saviour's walking on the water of the sea of Galilee, in the night time, to overtake his

disciples, whom he had "*constrained* to get "into a ship, to go before him unto the other "side," though, as the ship was detained by contrary winds in the midst of the sea, till he came to them, their embarking seems to have answered no end, except the display of his supernatural power in this singular miracle; and his curing all the maladies of the people of Gennesaret, by letting them only *touch the hem of his garment;* c. xvii. his paying tribute at Capernaum, by directing Peter to take the required piece of money out of a fish's mouth, where the miracle is rendered the more wonderful by the fish's being able to hold the money fast in its mouth till Peter took it out, though it was caught and pulled up with an hook and line; and c. xxi. the cursing the fig-tree because he found no fruit on it, wherewith to mitigate his hunger. Whether such miracles as these are suitable to the character of Jesus Christ; and whether it be any disparagement to the Gospel according to Luke, that they are not to be found in it, I leave to the candid reader to determine.

As to that most important mark, and to us the only convincing evidence of the authenticity of any sacred scripture, the testimony of the prophecies recorded in it, when com-

pared with their corresponding events, I find but one in this Gospel attributed to Matthew, which is not evidently borrowed, and for the most part verbally copied from Luke; that is c. xvi. v. 18 and 19, where the author makes our Lord foretell, that "the gates of hell shall "not prevail against his church;" and that he will give to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatsoever he shall bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven. But what is meant here by the gates of hell, and by not prevailing against the church of Christ? Does the first expression mean impious violence, or death and destruction, or all together? And does the last mean only, according to the literal sense of the original Greek word, growing strong and powerful against it? or does it signify utterly destroying it, so as to prevent its being finally established in the world? If the last only be all that is intended, it is not so intelligibly expressed, but predicts merely the same thing as the two prophetic parables of the mustard-seed and the leaven hid in three measures of meal; but, in every other sense, it is a false prediction: for the violence and deadly persecution of Pagans and of the orthodox church, as other better authenti-

cated prophecies foretold they would do, have prevailed so greatly against the true church of Christ, that a very small number of its members is any where to be found. And should any be inclined to think, as without doubt many do, that the orthodox church itself is the true church of Christ, yet ask Asia, Africa, and the south-east of Europe, whether Mahomedanism has not prevailed against her? And with respect to the latter part of the prediction, the very nature of the Gospel Covenant, as well as the whole history of Peter and the other Apostles, shews us, that neither he nor any of them had the power of forgiving or retaining sins; and that neither the whole college of Apostles, nor even Jesus Christ himself, ever have been or will be able (if it were possible to suppose them willing) to admit one vicious, unreformed person into, nor to exclude one virtuous, benevolent man out of, *the kingdom of heaven.* Indeed the whole conversation, of which this prophecy makes a part, is so exceedingly different from that which Luke tells us our Saviour held on the same occasion, that it cannot be entitled to any degree of credit, except with those, if any such can be, who think fit rather to reject the Gospel of Luke.

The twenty-fourth chapter is one entire long prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, and, as the author expresses it, *the end of the world*, composed of two separate prophecies of that event recorded by Luke, with a few alterations and additions. From some of these, one is led to think, the author must have intended to allude to the final day of judgment; but since he has adopted the very words of Luke, that the generation living in our Saviour's time should not pass away till all those predictions were fulfilled, we must suppose him to mean only the destruction and desolation of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, and the commencement of *the end of the world*, as signifying the last dispensation of the New Covenant of the Gospel, by the actual abolition of the Old Covenant of Moses. But then one addition which he has made to these prophecies is manifestly false; for he says, v. 14, "This Gos-" pel of the kingdom shall be preached in all " the world for a witness unto all nations, and " then shall the end come:" yet the Gospel was so far from being preached to all the nations of the world, before the destruction of Jerusalem, that there are still many amongst whom it is utterly unknown even at this day.

—At v. 9, he has directly contradicted Luke, at the time he was copying from him; for he tells us, that "then" (after the civil wars and great natural evils, which were to precede the destruction of Jerusalem,) "the Christians "should be persecuted, killed, and universally "hated;" all which our Lord, according to Luke, expressly said would come to pass, *before all these* things: and the whole Christian history demonstrates that the fact was as he has stated the prediction.—There is also another remarkable difference between these two writers in stating this prophecy: Luke informs us, that our Lord told his disciples *plainly*, that they needed not apprehend the ruin of the Jewish nation, at the beginning of the insurrections and wars in Palestine, for it would be some years afterwards before that calamity would take place; but that when they should see Jerusalem itself invested with armies, then the fatal period was arrived, and they should lose no time in saving themselves from the general ruin, by a speedy flight out of the devoted country; and there is every reason to believe, that the Christians actually profited by this plain and timely admonition: but this writer makes our Lord tell them to flee out of Judea, *when they shall see the abomi-*

nation of desolation spoken of by Daniel stand in the holy place; words to them absolutely unintelligible without an explanation, and which must, therefore, have rendered the prophetic warning entirely useless to them. And what could the author mean by adding, v. 22, that, "except those days should be shortened, "there should *no flesh* be saved; but that for "the elect's sake those days should be shorten-"ed?" To what circumstances, in the destruction of Jerusalem and the ruin of the Jewish nation, can such a sentence refer?

CHAPTER V.

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK.

SECTION I.

LET us next examine what internal evidence of authenticity is to be found in the Gospel according to Mark; and compare that also with the Evangelical history of Luke. This is the more necessary, because the author himself no where pretends to be Mark; and nothing can be slighter or less satisfactory than the external testimony or historic evidence in its favour; as every candid inquirer will be convinced, who attentively peruses the collection of those testimonies prefixed to the best editions of this Gospel, the chief of which, respecting a revelation to Peter of Mark's having written it, &c. are manifestly fabulous.

If we pursue the plan adopted with the two others, and begin by examining the style in which this history is composed, we shall

find it, with a very few exceptions, and no greater alterations than modern harmonists and paraphrasers make in these books every day, compiled entirely of passages copied, often literally, either from the Gospel called Matthew's, or Luke's. It is certain, therefore, that whoever the author was, he must have had both those Gospels before him, and consequently could not have written till after the former was published; that is, if there be any force in the arguments already submitted to the reader, not sooner than the beginning of the second century. He too, like the writer called Matthew, uses several Latin words written in Greek characters, contrary to the custom of all ordinary writers in Greek, prior to the reign of Trajan. From these circumstances, it seems impossible to consider the unknown author of this Gospel, in any other light, than as the first person who attempted to harmonize the two contradictory Gospels of Matthew and Luke; and, by extracting from each what he thought the most material passages, to compose of them one regular, consistent history of the public ministry of our Saviour. With this view, finding it absolutely impracticable to reconcile the two genealogies and accounts of the nativity and

infancy of Jesus, like many other later commentators, when they find themselves unable to elucidate the text, he has entirely omitted those parts of the two histories; and begins, where the original writing of Luke certainly began, with the preaching and baptism of John. For the same reason, as it is impossible to make the conclusions of those two Gospels harmonize together, this compiler abruptly broke off his history, at the eighth verse of the last chapter; and the twelve following verses, which are compiled partly from Luke and Matthew, and still more from the Gospel attributed to John, not having been found in the earliest and best copies of this work, are undoubtedly the addition of some still later hand, who has betrayed himself, by inadvertently making his addition expressly contradict the author whom he personated; for, in conformity to Matthew's Gospel, which he transcribed from, the pretended Mark, in the seventh verse, makes the angel order the two women *to tell his disciples to go into Galilee, and there they should see him*; but this Gospel-finishing copyist, at the ninth verse, begins a distinct history of our Lord's resurrection, different from that related six or seven verses before; and informs us, that in-

stead of their *seeing him in Galilee*, he appeared *at Jerusalem*, to Mary Magdalene, in one form; to two of the disciples, who were walking into the country, *in another form*, and afterwards, *at Jerusalem* again, (he does not say, whether *in a third form* or not) "to "all the eleven, as they sat at meat."

In enumerating the names of the twelve Apostles, in chap. iii. it is observable, that, though this writer has followed the Gospel called Matthew's, in making the Apostle Andrew, brother to Simon Peter, he has placed the name of Andrew, not second, but fourth in the list, as he stands in that given us by Luke, in Acts i.; which, since this writer has almost always transcribed literally from the Gospel of Matthew or Luke, affords great reason to think, that, in his copy of Luke, Andrew stood there, in that order, at the time of his writing. Yet he also shews his entire ignorance, that the Apostle James was the brother of the Lord Jesus, by calling him the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother; so that it is plain, he could be no writer of the Apostolic age.

In a book, which contains but a very few sentences, that are not directly copied from the two other Gospels, or close imitations of

them,* there can be but very little, peculiar to the author, to remark upon. One of these few passages is a parable, c. iv. v. 26, &c. which, though the hint is obviously taken from that of Matthew, of the wheat and tares, as it is here stated, is entirely this author's. He has kept clear of the solecism in the beginning, customary with the pretended Matthew; and uses the words *kingdom of God*, in the same sense with Luke; but with what propriety can it be said, that the conversion of mankind to the religion of the Gospel, is as imperceptible and unaccountable, as the vegetation of plants from seed? Was it not the reasonable and visible effects of the miracles and doctrines of its first preachers, which produced a conviction of its truth and divine authority? And if the harvest here represents the day of judgment, as in the Gospel of Matthew, (which, without doubt, the author intended) the insinuation, that that day would take place, as soon as the state of mankind, under the influence of the Gospel, is maturely accomplished, is equally repugnant to common sense and reason, and to the

* According to the tables of Ammianus, there are but twenty passages of any kind, in the whole Gospel, which are peculiar to this writer.

clearest and most expressive prophecies of the New Testament.

II. In the sixth chapter, verse 13, this writer tells us, without the least warrant from his originals, Luke and Matthew, that when our Lord sent out the twelve Apostles, with miraculous power, to cure diseases, they anointed the sick they healed, with oil. Now, since the very intent of these miraculous cures was to convince the Jews who beheld them, in a way peculiarly adapted to the kind, benevolent genius of the Gospel, of the supernatural interposition of the Deity, in favour of the new religion they announced; every application, though of the most simple kind, must necessarily tend to counteract the belief of the miracle, and afford ground for suspicion, that the cure was effected by some medical virtue of the oil they used, not by the immediate power of God; and therefore, as no such application is ever said to have been used by our Saviour, or any of his disciples, in either of Luke's histories, it is in the highest degree improbable, that any such unction was ever used by them; and the very mention of such a circumstance in this Gospel, and in the Epistle attributed to James,

affords a very strong presumptive proof, that neither of the writers lived in the Apostolic age; but that, they both wrote in the second century, when the preachers of Christianity, no longer having the miraculous gift of healing, yet pretending to possess it, conscious that no effect would be produced upon the patient, by their word or touch, introduced the formal ceremony of anointing with oil, accompanied by the united prayer of the Presbytery; and if, as, no doubt, sometimes happened, the sick person recovered, the cure was attributed to the miraculous efficacy of the pious, greasy ritual, which, that it might not be deemed, in any case absolutely ineffectual, whenever the patient died, was transferred to the next world, to secure his eternal salvation there; for which purpose alone, under the title of *extreme unction*, it is still used by the most perfectly and most consistently orthodox Church in Christendom.

The seventh chapter, v. 33, contains an account of our Lord's curing a deaf and dumb person, with such unmeaning gesticulations, as are very unworthy the character of the messenger of Almighty God—putting his fingers into his ears, and touching his tongue with his spittle.

In the eighth chapter, v. 12, the author, unable to reconcile his mind to what the pretended Matthew has said of the sign of the prophet Jonas, though he was actually copying from him, has thought proper flatly to contradict both him and Luke, and to make our Saviour declare, that no sign at all should be given to that generation.

At the twenty-third verse, this writer again represents our Saviour, in a very unbecoming manner, applying his spittle to the eyes of a blind man, in order to give him sight; and, as if one interposition of *Almighty* power were not sufficient to accomplish a perfect cure, the man's sight is not completely acquired, till he has applied his hands a second time to his eyes. It is worth observing also, that if this blind man had ever seen before, as seems to be insinuated in the word *restored*, it is inconceivable how, with even an indistinct vision, he could find the least resemblance between *men* and *trees walking*; and, if he had never enjoyed the blessing of sight till then, it was not possible for him to have had any idea of the ocular appearance of either men or trees.

To convince us, how improbable it is, that either our Saviour, or the Apostles whom he

delegated, should, in curing diseases, have used any such external applications as are recorded in this and the preceding chapter; and how displeasing such a conduct would have been to the Deity; it is only necessary to advert to the history of Moses striking the rock,* which tended to make the people believe that his stroke alone gave vent to the imprisoned waters, and made them flow. For it is recorded, as being immediately condemned by the Deity himself; and in punishment for his not clearly manifesting the miraculous interposition of the Almighty, by merely speaking to the rock, as he was commanded, he was doomed, like all the other rebellious Israelites, to die in the wilderness, and not to enter into the promised land. And had Jesus of Nazareth been guilty of the practices ascribed to him in this Gospel, and in that attributed to John, he must have been equally criminal in the sight of God.

The only prophecies that I have observed peculiar to this Gospel, attributed to Mark, are, first, c. x. v. 30, where he makes our Lord predict, that whosoever hath forsaken houses, lands, or friends, for his sake and the

* Num. xx. 7—12.

Gospel's, *shall receive* not only *eternal life in the world to come*, but *now in this time*, the very same articles multiplied *an hundred fold, with persecution.* As persecution can be exerted only upon a person's property, liberty, or life, it seems inconceivable how possessions of any kind should be so greatly multiplied in a state of persecution; and the very terms of the prediction appear to imply in them a manifest contradiction: but, howsoever they may be interpreted, the whole history of religious persecution, from the illustrious messenger of the New Covenant to the present hour, proves the prophecy to be absolutely false, and the writer of it altogether unworthy of credit.

The second is the prediction respecting Peter's denying his Master, c. xiv. v. 30, where, in direct contradiction to both the writings he had before him, he makes our Lord tell him, that before the cock should crow *twice* he would thrice deny him. Accordingly, v. 68—72, he says, *the cock crew* as soon as Peter had once denied him; and, after he had repeated his denial twice more, with oaths and curses very unbecoming a chosen disciple of Jesus Christ, the cock crew a second time. This relation is so absolutely ir-

reconcilable with what is given us in the Gospel according to Matthew, and *that* with the circumstances of the same event recorded by Luke, that two of the three must inevitably be false; and which those are, the judicious reader will decide as he thinks fit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN.

SECTION I.

WE come now to the fourth of the generally received Evangelical histories, which, by the tradition of the orthodox Church, is attributed to the Apostle John, the avowed author of the prophetic book of the Apocalypse. And as in our examination of the internal evidence of the authenticity of the other three, we have begun with taking notice of their style, it is impossible not to observe the striking difference there is between the language of the Apocalypse, and that in which this Gospel is written. To remove so obvious a difficulty in the way of attributing these two works to the same writer, commentators are accustomed to insinuate, (but without any proof of the fact) that, as John wrote his Gospel many years after he had written the Apocalypse, he had acquired,

by practice and experience, a much better knowledge of the Greek, than had been communicated by the miraculous gift of tongues: and, on that account, the style of his later work is quite unlike that of his first. The same critics might, with equal reason and equal satisfaction to their readers, have remarked also, that the same *superior* advantage of time and experience had given him a knowledge of the Platonic philosophy, of which, in his earlier days, he was entirely ignorant; for whoever the writer of this Gospel really was, it must be evident to every competent, unprejudiced judge, who reads it in the original, particularly the exordium, that he was well acquainted with the writings of Plato.

According to the tradition, that John was the Apostle who, in this Gospel, is said to have been the beloved disciple of Jesus, and to have leaned upon his bosom, at the last supper, the book itself tells us he was the author; for, speaking of him, c. xxi. v. 24, it says, "This is the disciple which testifieth of "these things and wrote these things, and *we* "*know* that *his* testimony is true:" but since it is unaccountable, how any writer should speak of himself in such a manner as this, the

same critical sagacity has invented a mode of solving this difficulty also, and informs us, merely upon its own conjecture, that the Gospel written by John ends with the twentieth chapter; and that the following chapter is an addition made afterwards by the Church of Ephesus: by which means, the palpable falsehood contained in the last verse, under the pretence of an hyperbole, is also entirely thrown upon the same Church. However, since both the diction and credibility of the narrative appear to be the same in the twenty-first, as in all the other chapters, the whole seems to merit to be accounted equally spurious, or equally genuine and authentic. Let us bring the whole, therefore, to the proposed test; observing, by the way, a gross contradiction between this writer and the pretended Matthew, at the very outset: for, c. i. v. 32, he tells us, that John the Baptist declared he did not know Jesus to be the destined Messiah, till he saw the Holy Spirit descending on him; whereas the Gospel of Matthew, c. iii. v. 14, informs us that he knew him as soon as he came to him; and, at first, refused to baptize him, "saying, I have need to be "baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Yet still the orthodox receive both these Gos-

pels for the genuine works of Apostles; and believe both these contradictory assertions to be truth, and even the inspired word of God!!!

Luke informs us, that, previous to our Lord's having any particularly attached disciples, he wrought many miracles in the different cities of Galilee, especially at Capernaum, where he healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever; and, since not the least hint is given of his being a different person of the same name, from the situation of Capernaum, from his so readily receiving our Lord on board his fishing boat, and letting down his net again at his command, contrary to his own opinion and inclination, it is natural to conclude, that it was the same Simon of Capernaum who, with the sons of Zebedee, struck with the wonderful draught of fishes, superadded to the cure of his wife's mother, immediately forsook their former occupation and their homes, and became the first faithful followers of Jesus. This writer, on the contrary, with whom, if he was the Apostle John, Luke long lived, and must have frequently conversed upon the subject at Jerusalem, after our Saviour's death, informs us, c. i. v. 35, &c. that before our Lord had worked any

miracle, two of the Baptist's disciples, one of whom was Andrew, whom he also makes Simon Peter's brother, without any call from Jesus, being told by John that he was the Lamb of God, followed him and attached themselves to him; and that Andrew induced his brother Simon to do the same, by telling him they had found the Messiah or Christ. So that Simon Peter instead of being the first, as Luke represents him, according to this Gospel, was only the third of our Lord's disciples; and none of them were induced by any such motive as the miraculous cure of a disease or the extraordinary draught of fishes; and far from telling us, like Luke, that Zebedee's sons, John and James, commenced disciples and followers of Jesus at the same time with Simon, the pretended John gives no account at all of the time or manner of their becoming disciples; but—telling us that Simon and Andrew were not citizens of Capernaum, but of Bethsaida; that Philip of the same city was called to be the fifth, and Nathaniel the sixth disciple, who, though declared by our Lord to be without guile, was not one of his Apostles, nor is ever once mentioned in any other history—the author goes on to inform us, that the beginning of our Sa-

viour's miracles was his turning water into wine, at a marriage feast in Cana, to which he, and his mother, and his disciples, were invited. How others can, with satisfaction to their own minds, receive both these contradictory histories for truth, I know not; to me it appears incontestable that one of them is fictitious and false.

According to Luke, our Saviour never went out of Galilee from the commencement of his public ministry till the feast of the Passover, at which he was crucified; and, upon his going to Jerusalem on that occasion, after entering the city amidst the acclamations of the multitude, who proclaimed him their promised king, *he began* (i. e. attempted) to eject those out of the temple, who indecently, as predicted by Jeremiah, c. vii. v. 11, made that house of prayer a place of traffic and unjust gain; a circumstance which, it is by no means probable, should have occurred to him twice. This writer, on the contrary, tells us, that a few days after his miracle at Cana, he went up to Jerusalem, to the feast of the Passover; and that there, in what would appear a sudden paroxysm of frantic zeal, if he were not represented as deliberately cool enough to plat

and prepare a *scourge of small cords* for the purpose, he drove all the traders and animals out of the temple, overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and scattered all their money about, with a violence as unbecoming the meek and benevolent Jesus, as it is improbable it would have been tamely submitted to by the other parties. It is to be observed also, that this supposed Apostle, in recording the instrument of violence, constructed and used by our Saviour, in this extraordinary manner, expresses it by a word, neither of Greek nor Hebrew origin, but by a Latin word, barbarously written in Greek characters, which, as I have observed in the case of the two preceding Evangelists, of itself affords strong grounds of presumption, that whoever the writer may be said to be, he did not live till after the beginning of the second century; and, when corroborated by other circumstances, so highly improbable in themselves, and so directly contradictory to the history of Luke, is a very satisfactory proof that he was no Apostle, nor any Jew, nor even a respectable Greek convert of the Apostolic age; but one of the many composers of spurious and fabulous writings of

the second century; and that he deserves not the least credit or attention.

II. When our Saviour had staid some time at Jerusalem, this author informs us, c. iii. v. 22, still in contradiction to the whole tenor of the Gospel according to Luke, that *he dwelt with his disciples in the land of Judea*; and that, by his disciples, as it is explained, c. iv. v. 2, *he baptized* there greater numbers than John, at the same time that *John baptized in Enon*, for that *John was not yet cast into prison*. This passage is so replete with the most palpable falsehood, that it is astonishing how any kind of delusion should have induced creatures, endowed with reason, so long to have received it as the word of truth, and the work of an Apostle of Jesus Christ. In the first place, the two writers called Matthew and Mark both positively assert, that Jesus did not enter upon his public ministry, nor was followed by a single disciple, till *after John was cast into prison*; and though, for reasons already stated, if Luke's history did not more than insinuate the same thing, their testimony would have no weight with me, yet such gross contradiction ought to convince

the most orthodox, that there must be falsehood on one side or the other, if not on both; and that, therefore, common sense and reason require them, *at least*, to reject as false and spurious, either this Gospel attributed to John, or both the Gospels attributed to the other two. In the next place, from the two respectable histories of Luke, confirmed by the very nature and circumstances of the Gospel, we know for certain, that baptism was never used by the disciples of Jesus, till after the memorable day of Pentecost, and then only for the same purpose, for which it had been always used by the Jews, as a form of admitting proselytes to their religion; a religion they then preached for the first time, and which, during their master's life, they did not themselves understand. When the twelve, and afterwards the seventy, were sent forth to excite the attention of the people, by miraculous acts of kindness and compassion, and to announce to them the approaching promulgation of the New Covenant of the kingdom of God, baptizing made no part of their commission; and they returned without any addition to their numbers; nay, so far were *all men* from *coming to Jesus* as disciples, as is asserted v. 26, that when the Apostles and the

whole society of Christians were assembled together, after his ascension, the number amounted but to one hundred and twenty, that is, only about forty more than those original disciples, who had been deputed on the two commissions; whereas the Baptist's disciples were so numerous, that Josephus attributes his death to Herod's jealousy of him on that very account.

In the fourth chapter, this historian relates our Lord's removal from his dwelling in Judea to Galilee; and, as the road lay through Samaria, he entertains us with an episode concerning our Saviour and a libidinous woman of Samaria, who, having had no less than five husbands, was then living as the concubine of a sixth man. This woman expresses her surprise, that he, who was a Jew, should ask drink of a Samaritan, which the author explains by informing us, that *the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans;* though, to account for our Lord's being left alone, he had just told us, that *all* his disciples, who, a few verses before, are represented to be so numerous, "were gone away into the Sama-"ritan city Sychar," (a city never heard of by any one else) "to buy meat." On their return with the meat, whilst the woman went

into the city to tell the people she had found the Messiah or Christ, in a conversation with his disciples, he observes that it was then four months to the time of harvest, which fixes the time of year to be about our January; so that this writer makes our Lord continue in Judea, after the preceding Passover, baptizing and making disciples, during John's baptizing and preaching, as long a time as the three other Gospels allot to the duration of his whole public ministry; which they assure us did not begin till John's ministry was ended by his imprisonment. From the natural harvest, he takes occasion to suggest the spiritual harvest, which then presented itself in the ripeness of the Samaritans for conversion; who, if this account be true, were wonderfully more mature than their neighbours the Jews, though, as is remarked, v. 22, they were far more ignorant in affairs of the true religion; and though, according to Luke's histories, the Samaritans refused to receive him, when he was going to the feast of the Passover, at which he died; and no Samaritan city was converted to the Gospel, till Philip preached it in Samaria, after the death of Stephen. In the words of this writer, our Lord adds, "Herein is that

"saying true, one soweth and another reapeth. "I sent you to reap that whereon ye be- "stowed no labour; *other men* laboured, and "*ye* are entered into *their* labour." Luke informs us, that after our Saviour had preached and performed many miracles throughout all Galilee, that is, long after the period here recorded, because the writer tells us the second of his miracles in Galilee was not done till after this conversation, he sent out two different deputations of his disciples, to precede him, in announcing to the Jews the approaching establishment of God's New Convenant with them and all the world; that, after his death, they were commissioned and miraculously qualified to preach Christ and the New Covenant of the kingdom of God, first to the Jewish nation, and afterwards to the Samaritans and Gentiles of the whole world; this preaching, we find, they called planting, and sowing the seed of the Gospel, in allusion to their Lord's parable of the sower; and the only harvest intended and hoped for by them was the fruits of moral virtue, in the lives of their converts; as for themselves, they knew they were to receive no recompense nor advantage from their own labour, till after death. Who then were these sowers of the word of God,

prior to the disciples of Christ? When were his disciples sent to reap and not to sow? What did they ever reap, about which they had bestowed no labour? And who were those *other men*, into whose labours they entered? Surely, a writer so little consistent with the best confirmed truth, and with common sense, is very unjustly accounted an Apostle of Jesus Christ! In the same strain of fictitious jargon, this writer continues to inform us, that our Lord taught and convinced both the woman and the Samaritans of that city, that he was *the Christ, the Saviour of the world;* though, according to Luke, he never announced himself in that character, to the Jews, in his life-time; but checked his own disciples, and forbad them to call him so to any man; and, after his resurrection, convinced them, from the prophecies, that he could not become *the Christ*, the predicted King under the New Covenant, till after he had died, and been made literally the son of God, by being his *first-born* from the dead to a life of immortality.

In the fifth chapter, the author tells us, that after the cure of the nobleman's son at Capernaum, which, he says, was the second of our Saviour's miracles in Galilee, he went again to

Jerusalem, to a feast of the Jews; but does not say what feast. According to his own description of the time of our Lord's return to Galilee, that it was four months before harvest, it ought to be another feast of the Passover, unless we suppose him to have transgressed the injunction of the Mosaic Law. If this writer, therefore, were a Jew, or well versed in the customs and ordinances of the Jews, he must mean that this was a second Passover, at which our Saviour attended, after the commencement of his public ministry; yet after his return again into Galilee from this feast in the very next chapter, we are told that he crossed the sea of Galilee, and that "the Passover, a "feast of the Jews, was nigh." Surely this writer is the most extraordinary chronologist and historiographer that ever appeared in the world! However, he does not say, that Jesus went up to this third approaching Passover; but after relating the same miraculous feeding a large multitude, and walking upon the water, recorded in the Gospel attributed to Matthew, with a discourse to the multitude altogether peculiar to himself, the author tells us, in the seventh chapter, that Jesus continued in Galilee, because the Jews of Judea sought to kill him; but that, the feast of tabernacles being

near, after his brethren were gone up without him, "he also went up to the feast *secretly*;" and yet "in the midst of the feast, he went "up into the temple and taught" *publicly*. In the fifth verse of this chapter, the author of this gospel tells us, that the brethren of Jesus did not believe on him; so that he also was ignorant that the Apostle James was a brother of Jesus, and directly contradicts both Luke's histories, the first of which informs us that his mother and his brethren accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and the second, that after his death, resurrection, and ascension, they continued at Jerusalem with the eleven Apostles. From this feast till after the feast of Dedication, this writer tells us our Lord continued in Jerusalem or its environs; then, to avoid the attempts of the Jews to apprehend him, he retired to the country beyond Jordan, where John first baptized; and from thence, c. xi. upon the death of Lazarus, he came again into Judea to Bethany: that, to escape the malice of the Chief Priests, he withdrew with his disciples, to the city of Ephraim, adjoining the wilderness of Judea, and continued there till he went again to Bethany, six days before the Passover, at which he suffered; and from thence to Jerusa-

lem, riding on a young ass, amidst the hosannas of the people, who came forth to meet him.

We see then, that, according to this writer, our Saviour entered upon his public ministry whilst that of John the Baptist still subsisted: and that the Passover, at which he was crucified, was the fourth from the comencement of his ministry. Luke, on the contrary, plainly intimates, as indeed is reasonable to expect, that John's ministry had ceased in consequence of his imprisonment by Herod, before Jesus began to teach and to make himself conspicuous; and assures us, that our Lord was crucified at the very first Passover after his entering on his ministry. This writer tells us, that he resided chiefly, and performed most of his miracles, at Jerusalem and in Judea; that he was but very little in Galilee; and that he made and had great numbers of disciples in Judea: yet from the Acts of the Apostles, c. i. v. 11, and c. ii. v. 7, we find, that *all* his disciples were Galileans; and, from Luke's Gospel, that almost all his miracles were wrought in Galilee; and that he did not quit the jurisdiction of Herod, till he set out, with his disciples, to travel through Samaria to Jerusalem, in order to keep the fatal Passover;

that he did not sojourn at the city of Ephraim; but kept the direct road from Jericho; and when he came near Bethany, instead of going to visit the family of Lazarus, he only sent two of his disciples to fetch the ass's colt on which he proposed to enter Jerusalem. It is not possible, therefore, for two histories of the life and actions of the same person to be more directly contradictory to each other; consequently they cannot both be true. The language also of these two scriptures, respecting the person of our Lord himself, is equally irreconcilable. The supposed John begins with representing him as the divine Logos of Plato, under an human form, dwelling amongst men; repeatedly represents him as Omniscient,* and in almost every conversation with Samaritans, Jews, or his own disciples, makes him declare himself to be the Christ, the son of God, and never to acknowledge any other father but God; though this writer, c. vi. v. 42, as well as Luke, c. iv. v. 22, informs us, that he was known by all the inhabitants of Nazareth to be the son of Joseph; and Luke, that he never spoke of himself, but under the denomination of *the son of man;* and that he expressly forbad his being called the Christ

* See c. i. v. 48.—ii. 25.—iv. 18.—xxi. 17.

during his life, for reasons which he suggested in some of his discourses, before his death; but which he explained more clearly after his resurrection. From all which, it is abundantly evident, that the author of this Gospel was not the Apostle John, with whom Luke long lived in intimacy, and from whom and the other Apostles, he received the chief materials of his first history; but a convert of the second century from the Platonic school, who did not understand the Jewish prophecies concerning the Christ or Son of God, even after the explanation given of them by Jesus himself and all his Apostles: and who was one of the earliest fathers of that apostate, anti-christian Church, whose doctrines are a heterogeneous compound of Paganism, Judaism, and Christianity.

III. Let us continue our attention, however, to the sequel of his narrative; and compare his account of what preceded, accompanied, and followed our Lord's crucifixion, with that which is given us by Luke.

The last named writer, we have seen, informs us, that the last supper our Saviour eat with his Apostles was the Paschal supper, which he told them, he had been particularly

desirous to eat with them; that at that supper, after instituting the communion of bread and wine, as a rite to be observed by his disciples, merely in grateful remembrance of him, he declared that one of them would betray him; but did not explain who it was. This author, on the contrary, tells us, that the last supper he eat with them was *before the feast of the Passover*; and, instead of the institution of the Lord's supper, represents our Saviour as suddenly, *after supper was ended*, adopting the very unnecessary, useless, and unbecoming ceremony of washing his Apostles' feet, a species of extraordinary, unmeaning humiliation, which none of them ever imitated; that, after this ceremony, he told them, one of them would betray him; and intimated to one Apostle, his favourite above the rest, that it was Judas Iscariot, by giving him a sop, though supper was already over. From hence, to his being led to Pilate's judgement hall, this author's narration differs very greatly from that of Luke; and there it flatly contradicts him. For persisting to say, that it was the preparation for the Passover, though Luke assures us the preceding day was the day on which it was necessary to kill the Paschal lamb; and that our Saviour accordingly then

eat it with his Apostles; the author tells us, that the rulers of the Jews themselves, did not go into the judgement hall, for fear they should be defiled, so as to be prevented eating the Passover; and that, for that reason, the Roman Governor, with an amazing degree of condescension, went out and in from his judgment seat to them, and from them to the judgment seat, several times. Luke, however, in terms as diametrically opposite as truth to falsehood, affirms, that the Chief Priests and Elders of the Jews were present at Pilate's examination of our Saviour, and urged the only accusation against him; and tells us, that after Herod had sent him back to him, Pilate assembled the rulers and people of the Jews, and "said unto them, ye have brought "this man unto me, as one that perverteth "the people; and behold I, having examined "him *before you*, have found no fault in him." When Pilate had consented to gratify them by his crucifixion, this writer says, that Jesus himself bare his own cross to the place where he was crucified; Luke, that the Jews compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian, to bear the cross after Jesus. Luke tells us, that after our Lord's death, Joseph of Arimathea took the body, and laid it in a new se-

pulchre; that the women were present, and saw how and where it was laid; and went and prepared spices and ointments to embalm it with, as soon as the sabbath was ended. This writer, on the contrary, informs us, that Joseph and Nicodemus together embalmed the body with an hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes, and other spices, "as the manner of the Jews is to bury;" and then laid it in the sepulchre. Luke assures us, that in the evening after our Lord's resurrection, that is, in the beginning of the second day of the week, he appeared to all the *eleven* Apostles and other disciples, who were assembled together with them; and, from that time to his ascension, was frequently seen by them at Jerusalem; that he then explained to them, the meaning of the prophecies concerning himself; instructed them in the nature and purport of the Gospel; and bid them tarry at Jerusalem till the day of Pentecost, when they were to receive the Holy Ghost, or holy inspiration: that they did so, and never returned again to dwell in their own country, Galilee. The pretended John, in contradiction to all this, tells us, that the evening on which the disciples saw our Saviour, was the first day of the week, which shews that he was no Jew, but one

who reckoned his time like the Greeks and Romans: that all the eleven Apostles were not present; for that Thomas was not with them, and did not see him till eight days after; that, instead of telling them to wait till Pentecost for the gift of the holy inspiration, he then "breathed on them, and said, receive "ye the Holy Ghost;" and at the same time, (O impious falsehood!) gave them power to remit or to retain any person's sins; that, after this, instead of continuing at Jerusalem, they all went back to Galilee; that our Lord *there* appeared to them for *the third time* after his resurrection, at the Sea of Tiberias, to reclaim them, by a second wonderful draught of fishes, from their old occupation to which they had returned; and that, after ordering Peter, if he loved him more than the fishes he had caught, to feed his lambs and his sheep, he left them all in Galilee. Were such irreconcilable, contradictory evidence as this to be brought to support any cause whatever in our own courts of justice, what would be the sentiments of every impartial, honest jury-man, concerning it?

IV. In prosecution of the plan of inquiry laid down and pursued with the other three Evangelical histories, our next step is

to observe the miracles and extraordinary acts attributed to our Saviour, which are peculiar to this writer; and then the prophecies recorded by him.

The first miracle he has related, and which he calls the beginning of the miracles of Jesus, is the changing the water into wine at a marriage feast, when the inviter's stock of wine grew low; though the story itself informs us, that the guests had already drunk so *well*, that the master of the feast judged it more probable, that if any more wine had been brought them, it would have been of an inferior quality to what they had been drinking; but this miraculous wine was of so superior and excellent a flavour, that it must necessarily re-excite even the sated appetite, and tempt them to continue their intemperance with a fresh relish. That this writer, and many another orthodox preacher of what is called Christianity, had he been endowed with sufficient power, would have performed, and gladly partaken of, the intemperate joys of so wonderfully seasonable a transmutation, I can easily suppose; and think it not improbable that he would also have exerted his supernatural ability to the enriching himself and his poor disciples, by transmuting the cheap

and baser metals into gold, and to the enjoyment of many other instances of sensual indulgence, equally laudable and equally Christian as the intemperate use of strong liquor; but whosoever rightly apprehends the character and doctrine of the holy Mediator of the New Covenant, and has observed how utterly incompatible every degree of sensual excess is with the Gospel precepts of sobriety, temperance, moderation, and the subjection of our bodily appetites to reason and religious duty, will find such a miracle as this incredible, though it had been recorded in all the four histories; and coming in so very exceptionable a form, upon the single, unsupported testimony of so very exceptionable an historian, it is altogether as unworthy of belief as the fabulous Roman Catholic legend of St. Nicholas's Chickens, of later times. To Luke's credit, he is so far from giving it the least confirmation, that though he informs us our Lord, from motives of compassion for a large multitude who had followed him to such a distance from their own homes, and staid to hear him so late, that they could not otherwise have been provided with necessary sustenance, miraculously fed five thousand persons with only five loaves and

two fishes; yet he does not tell us of his changing so much as one firkin of water into wine on that charitable occasion, though, here, he is said to transmute eighteen firkins, to prolong the festivity of those who, by their own confession, had already drank very abundantly.

The second miracle recorded by this writer is the healing the nobleman's son at Capernaum, without seeing him, in the fourth chapter: a miracle much more becoming the character of Jesus than the foregoing. It appears, however, to be an imitation of the healing the centurion's servant of the same city, related by Luke; though many of the principal circumstances are so altered, that it cannot pass for the same; and it is highly improbable, that two different cases, so similar to each other, should occur at the same place, within so short a space of time.

In the fifth chapter, our author relates the miraculous cure of a poor, friendless, impotent man. So far all is credible. But unfortunately he tells us, this man had been long waiting to obtain his cure from the miraculous efficacy of the Pool of Bethesda, whose waters, being disturbed at certain seasons, by an Angel, who descended for that purpose,

acquired for a moment the wonderful virtue of healing every kind of sickness or disease; but lost it again so instantaneously, that none, but the single patient who got first into the pool after the troubling of the water, could receive the least benefit from it. In contradiction, therefore, to the whole tenor of the Jewish history, from whence we learn, that there was no prophet, nor any supernatural interposition of divine providence, amongst the Jews, from the time of their last return from Babylon, to the coming of Jesus Christ, this writer informs us of a standing miracle amongst them, notoriously and frequently repeated in the sheep-market, that is, in one of the most public places in Jerusalem. Had this been true, it could never have escaped the notice of either Jew or Roman, resident in that metropolis; but must have been often spoken of by every historian who gave an account of that city: yet no such circumstance is so much as once hinted at by Luke, Josephus, nor any of the Roman historians.

The next extraordinary, though not properly miraculous, transaction related of our Saviour by this writer, is his conduct respecting the woman taken in adultery, c. viii. a story, which has not one single circumstance

attending it to recommend it to our belief. In the first place, the Jewish law did not order the convicted of adultery to be stoned, but only to be put to death. Secondly, before any criminal could be stoned to death, as we see in the case of Stephen, he was to be brought, not before a private individual, like our Saviour, in no office of magistracy, but before the Jewish Council; where, if he was condemned, the whole congregation of the people were to stone him; and the witnesses of his guilt, not those who were without sin amongst the people, were to cast the first stone at him. Thirdly, the Mosaic law says, "the man who committed adultery with his "neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adul-"teress shall surely be put to death:" yet, though the woman is said to have been taken in the very fact, the man, who must have been taken so too, and whom the law points out as principal, both in the crime and in the punishment, is not brought by these Scribes and Pharisees together with the woman. Fourthly, our Lord, to the very end of his life, shewed himself a zealous observer of the laws of the Mosaic Covenant, which were not cancelled till after his resurrection and the promulgation of the New Covenant

of the Gospel, And, lastly, Luke assures us, that, when applied to on another occasion, to settle a dispute between two brothers respecting the division of their patrimony, he referred them to the proper legal arbitrators of such matters, asking the party that applied to him,* *who made me a judge or a divider over you?*

The next miracle, mentioned by this author, is in the ninth chapter, the giving sight to a man born blind, by anointing his eyes with clay, made from the dust of the ground, and his spittle, and then sending him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam; upon which, as I have done on similar instances, in the Gospel according to Mark, I must observe, that, if he would have us think that Jesus intended to persuade the people, that such an unguent, worthy only of a mountebank, had any medical virtue, he deceived them, and transferred the honour of the cure from the immediate influence of the supernatural power of the Almighty, to his own medical sagacity, which could combine simple natural causes, of such apparent inefficacy, so as to produce the most wonderful effect; and, whether he intended it or not, such an application could

* Luke c. xii. v. 14.

only derogate from the glory due to God, by bringing the miracle into suspicion with the less credulous amongst the people, and inducing them to attribute the cure to the virtue of some more powerful medicine, concealed under the form of an unguent, made of powder of dirt and human spittle. In every view, therefore, such trifling mummery is too unbecoming the character of our blessed Saviour, to be received upon the bare testimony of such a writer as this.

The only other miracle recorded by this author, remaining unnoticed, is the resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany, in the eleventh chapter, a legend which, as far as I am capable of judging, has many strong marks upon it of fictitious falsehood; but not one single feature of probability belonging to it. For, first, Lazarus is represented as being our Lord's particularly beloved friend; and if any one man had been so preferred by him, it seems impossible that the man himself, and above all, his miraculous restoration to life, should not have been repeatedly mentioned by Luke, in both his histories; yet *he* is so far from suggesting to us that Jesus had any such friend, that he informs us, when he was told that his mother and brethren were

enquiring for him, he answered, that *his* nearest and dearest friends and relations were his disciples, who heard the word of God and obeyed it. Secondly, our Lord repeatedly declared, that no man was worthy of him, or could be his disciple, who did not forsake family, friends, and all he had, for his sake and the Gospel's; yet, according to this history, Lazarus, his dearly beloved friend, never forsook his family and abode at Bethany, to accompany him, like his Apostles; nor is he said, even by this only writer who mentions him, to have ever taken an active part in the promulgation of that New Covenant to mankind, to establish which, was the sole object of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection from the dead; and which, during his whole public ministry, seemed alone to occupy his thoughts and attention. Thirdly, of all the instances of dead persons restored to life again, related in either the Old or New Testament, this of Lazarus is by far the most wonderful miracle; for, in all the other cases, the renovation of life so soon followed the expiration of the deceased, that they appear to have been instances of suspended respiration restored; and the supernatural influence of divine power had only to cause the same renewal of

the vital motion of the fluids, whereon sense and animation depend, which, in cases of drowned or suffocated persons, is frequently produced in our times, by warmth, persevering friction, and the application of stimulating medicines; nay, even of our Lord's resurrection itself, we are told, that David's prophecy concerning it, was literally fulfilled, and that "he, whom God raised up, saw no "corruption:" but of Lazarus, we are informed, that "he had lain in the grave four "days," and that, (as to be sure was likely in that hot climate) his body was already putrified. Now, for what purpose is this greatest of all such miracles supposed to be wrought? Here was no desolate, disconsolate widow, or distressed, aged parent, to be supported and comforted by his restoration to life, where the miraculous exertion would have strikingly displayed the spirit of compassion, and merciful benevolence, so peculiar to the religion of the New Covenant; no use proposed from it, for the conversion of the Jews, for our Lord had foretold, that even his own resurrection would be ineffectual for that purpose, declaring, that if they hearkened not to the predictions of Moses and the prophets, concerning him, "they would not be persuaded,

"though one rose from the dead." And with respect to the Gospel, the grand object of of our Saviour's mission, Lazarus was never of the least use in preaching it; so that the Almighty is here introduced, as enabling Jesus to perform the greatest miracle imaginable, for no kind of purpose whatsoever. The writer, indeed, tells us, that, on this account, many of the Jews at Jerusalem believed on him; but this is flatly contradicted by Luke, who, as I have before observed, assures us, that all his disciples, at his death, were Galileans; and that the whole number amounted but to one hundred and twenty. Fourthly, the name Lazarus signifies a person, *destitute of aid and support*, and as such, is with great propriety applied by our Lord, in the parable, to the wretched object of commiseration, that lay begging at the rich man's gate. But was the groundless fancy of some commentators justly founded, that Lazar, without the Greek termination, is the same as Eleazar, still, who can imagine, that our Saviour would have chosen to denominate the feigned beggar, of a parable of his own invention, by the peculiar name of a beloved friend, so dear to him, as he is here represented to have been? Fifthly, the very relation of the circumstances

of this pretended miracle asserts an absolute impossibility; for it tells us, that, at our Lord's command, Lazarus *came forth from* from the sepulchre, though he was *bound hand and foot, with grave clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin*, and that, after he was come forth, Jesus bid them loose him and let him go. Such, and so very different from those recorded by Luke, are the miracles of what the orthodox receive for the Gospel according to the Apostle John!

V. As to what is to us the grand internal testimony of authenticity, indispensably necessary in every scripture, which contains the history of a supernatural revelation, predictions of future events, verified by their actual completion, after all that we have already seen of this writer, to find out such evidence in his work, peculiar to himself, would be as unaccountable and wonderful as any of the extraordinary miracles, with which he has endeavoured to astonish the ignorant credulity of the second century; but though, with a degree of circumstantial minuteness, which no writer of credit would have pretended to, he has reported, with verbal exactnesss, the discourses, not of Jesus only, but of John the

Baptist also, to his particular disciples, at the distance of, at least, thirty-six years after they were uttered, and some of them of very considerable length; he has not thought fit to introduce any thing, which can, with propriety, be deemed a prophecy. Some few short sentences, however, are scattered here and there, which, as they seem to refer to futurity, demand our attention on this occasion; although the sense of them, so far as it is discoverable, is only what is met with in better authenticated scriptures, confessedly written long before this history. Of these, the first that occurs is, c. ii. v. 19, where, speaking, as the author himself explains it to us, *of the temple of his body*, Jesus says to the Jews, "destroy this temple, and in "three days, I will raise it up." The obvious sense is only, what is much more clearly expressed by our Saviour to his disciples, according to Luke, viz. that, after his crucifixion he should rise to life again the third day; but the mode of expressing it, in this place, contradicts the account given of that important event, by every other primitive preacher of the Gospel; for it makes our Lord assure them, that, though dead, he would raise himself up; whereas all the other

Apostles, and even John himself (for he was in company with, and therefore agreed with Peter, Acts iii. 15) unanimously assert, that it was not himself, but *God, who raised him from the dead.*

In chapter iv. v. 21, the author makes our Saviour say to the Samaritan woman, "believe me the hour cometh, when ye shall, "neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusa-"lem, worship the Father." Had the words been, that, under the New Covenant, God should no longer be worshipped there with sacrifices and oblations, they would have been true, and of the same import with many other passages, both of the Old and New Testament; but in the indefinite sense, in which they are here used, nothing can be falser; for Christianity teaches men to worship God, both at Jerusalem and Samaria, and in every place upon the globe.

In chapter v. verse 43, we find our Lord saying to the Jews, "I am come in my fa-"ther's name, and ye receive me not; if ano-"ther shall come in his own name, him ye "will receive." Which words evidently imply, first, that some one would falsely assume the character of the predicted Messiah, without deriving his authority from God; and se-

condly, that the Jewish nation would receive him as such; but of all the false Christs, who appeared amidst the final wars and calamities of Judea, there was not one who did not pretend to come with the authority of God, and to be able to evince it, by working miracles; and though each was followed by more or fewer of the common people, yet the Jewish nation in general, who rejected our blessed Saviour, from that time to this, have never received any man as their expected Messiah.

In chapter viii. v. 51, our Lord is represented, as saying, "verily, verily if a man "keep my saying, he shall never see death," or, as it is repeated in the next verse, "shall "never taste of death;" and again, c. xi. v. 25 and 26, he not only says "he who be-"lieveth on me, though he were dead, yet "shall he live," but also, "whosoever liveth "and believeth in me, shall never die." What meaning could the writer have, in such absurd and groundless predictions as these? Paul, as well as daily experience, assures us, that *in Adam*, in our human nature, *all men die*, and we know, that our Lord himself, his Apostles, and all his most faithful disciples, died, or, in the words of the author, *have seen or tasted of death;* and if we should suppose

that he only intended to insinuate that, on account of the certainty of the resurrection of his disciples, their natural death was not to be accounted dying; yet still, according to this author himself, the quibble would hold as truly of the most profligate unbeliever as of those who believed on him; for, c. v. v. 28 and 29, he says, "the hour is coming "in which all that are in the graves shall hear "the voice of the Son of God, and shall come "forth, they that have done good unto the re- "surrection of life, and they that have done "evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

In chapter xiv. v. 16, &c. our Lord, in the style peculiar to this writer, is made to promise his disciples, after his death, the spiritual comfort and assistance of divine inspiration; but this is an event, which had taken place long before the earliest date allotted for the composition of this pretended Gospel.

In chapter xvi. v. 32, Jesus, in his last discourse, says to his disciples, "Behold the "hour cometh, yea is now come, that ye shall "be scattered, every man to his own home, "and shall leave me alone:" and according to this writer, they not only deserted him at his apprehension, but after his death and resurrection; and even after his giving them the

Holy Ghost, they went every one to his own home in Galilee, and recommenced their former occupations: but, unhappily for the author's credit, this is not only repugnant to reason and probability, but irreconcilably contradictory to both the histories of Luke. These, and two or three more sentences such as these, to be picked out of the long, valedictory conversation of Jesus, said to be held with his disciples immediately preceding his crucifixion, make up the whole of the internal testimony of the spirit of prophecy to be met with in this scripture, so long injuriously attributed to the prophetic Apostle John.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE EPISTLES.

SECTION I.

HAVING thus stated, what to me appear contradictions absolutely irreconcilable; and submitted to the public, the reasons which have long induced me to reject three of the four generally received Gospels, as spurious fictions of the second century, unnecessary, and even prejudicial, to the cause of true Christianity, and in every respect unworthy of the regard which so many ages have paid to them; I have accomplished all that I at first proposed. Leaving every reader, therefore, to judge for himself, as I have done, and to criticise my reasoning with the same unreserved freedom, with which, though a sincere convert to the Gospel Covenant, I have found it necessary for my own rational conviction to scrutinize the respective authenticity and credibility of these import-

ant scriptures, it was my original intention, here to have closed the present disquisition. But, because the same train of investigation hath led me to reject likewise several of the canonical Epistles, upon the sole authority of which, several fundamental doctrines of the orthodox Church, and of various sects of professed Christians, are confidently taught the people, for doctrines of the Gospel of Christ, I think it my duty, to add briefly my reasons for expunging also out of the volume of duly authenticated scriptures of the *New Covenant*, the Epistles, to the Romans—to the Ephesians—to the Colossians—to the Hebrews—of James—of Peter—of John—of Jude—and, in the book of the Revelation, the Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia.

Of these, whosoever is at all acquainted with the history of the constitution of the present canon of the Christian scriptures, well knows that the Epistles to the Hebrews, of James, second of Peter, second and third of John and of Jude, were rejected as spurious by many Churches, from the first of their appearance; and not universally received as genuine writings of the authors whose names they bear, till the fifth century, when a majority of votes in the Council of Carthage,

for the Greek Church, and the decision of Pope Innocent, for the Latin, determined the long controverted question, in favour of their genuine authenticity; a determination which, to me, who am both a *Protestant* against papal infallibility, and fully convinced of the corrupt apostasy of the prelates of the Church, much earlier than the fifth century, affords no kind of satisfaction, but rather excites the contrary.

In the Epistle to the Romans, the author writes indeed in the name of Paul; but he writes to a Christian Church, already subsisting at Rome, and celebrated for its faith in Christ *throughout the whole world*, before he himself had been there; for, v. 13—15, he says, "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, "that often-times I purposed to come unto "you (but was let hitherto), that I might have "some fruit among you also, even as among "other Gentiles; I am debtor both to the "Greeks and the barbarians, both to the wise "and the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I "am ready to preach the Gospel to you that "are at Rome also." In c. xv. v. 25, &c. he ascertains the time of Paul's writing this Epistle to be, when he was going to Jerusalem, with the contributions for the poor Christians of that

city, that is, in the reign of Claudius; and says that, when he has performed that good office, he will come, by way of Rome, into Spain. Now, whoever has read, with proper attention, the history of Paul's travels, written by his friend and fellow-traveller, Silas or Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, must be convinced, that Paul never had the least idea of travelling into Spain; and that he did not go to Rome, till, by the partiality of Festus to his persecutors, *he was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar.* From the same history it is evident also, that when Paul arrived at Rome, for the first time, in the reign of Nero, there was no Christian Church there, as indeed it is not at all probable there should have been; because Paul was the Apostle particularly chosen and delegated for that purpose, and he, accordingly, first preached the Gospel to the distant Gentiles, as recorded in the Acts. From the same history, there is every reason to believe, that the Gospel had never been preached beyond the limits of Asia, till Paul was, in a vision, admonished to go into Macedonia, and from thence into Greece; yet Paul is made to write this Epistle to the Christian converts at Rome, whilst he was preaching the Gospel

at Corinth. Who then was that other Apostle to the Gentiles, who so far preceded Paul, as already to have reached Rome, without preaching the Gospel to the inhabitants of the intervening countries of Asia Minor and Greece, and to have founded a Church there, early enough for its being *spoken of throughout the whole world*, when Paul, in the execution of the commission miraculously given to him by Christ himself, had advanced no farther than Macedonia and Greece? Besides, from the last chapter of the Acts, it appears incontestably, that they were not Christians, but Jews, who met Paul at Appii Forum; that his first step, when he arrived at Rome, was to call together the Jews resident there, and exculpate himself for having appealed to the Emperor; that those Jews, far from knowing the Gospel to have been already preached and received at Rome, declared themselves totally ignorant concerning it, except that it was every where spoken against, and were desirous to be informed of its doctrines by him; that they all assembled for that purpose, at his lodging, on an appointed day, when he preached to them the New Covenant of the kingdom of God the whole day, and pointed out to them those passages of

the Law of Moses and the prophets, wherein it was predicted; that upon their disagreeing and leaving him, he said, "*Be it known* to "you, that the salvation of God is sent (that "is, the Gospel is to be preached) to the "Gentiles, and that they *will hear* it." Whereas, according to this Epistle, it must have *been known* already to the Jews of Rome, that the Gospel *had been* preached to the Gentiles of that city, and that they *had received* it. These palpable, and as they seem to me, irreconcilable contradictions, oblige me utterly to reject this Epistle, called Paul's, and to regard it only as one of the many spurious forgeries of the second century, unworthy the least serious attention. I cannot, however, forbear remarking farther the inconsistency of this writer, (which indeed must generally be discernible in all falsifiers) in making Paul personally acquainted with so long a list of members of the Church at Rome, where he had never been, amongst whom we find Aquila and Priscilla, and even his own mother, to whom he sends salutation in the last chapter, v. 13. Of the two first, Luke tells us, that, about or rather before the pretended date of this Epistle, they had left Rome, being Jews, in obedience to an edict of Clau-

dius. And, if there is any reason to believe that Paul's mother was then living, is it credible, that an old woman of Tarsus, in Cilicia, whose son was so wonderfully appointed to preach the Gospel, and who was occupied in that commission in Asia and Greece, should leave her native country and such a son, and ramble after other preachers of the Gospel, at so advanced an age, to the far distant metropolis of Italy? But, in the eleventh chapter, the author clearly betrays himself to be, not Paul, but some person who lived and wrote some time after the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews; for to these events alone, can the following sentences refer: v. 12, "If the fall of them" (the Jews) "be the riches of the world, and "the diminishing of them the riches of the "Gentiles, how much more their fullness?" Again, v. 15, "If the casting away of them "be the reconciling of the world, what shall "the receiving of them be?" Again, v. 21 and 22, "If God spared not the natural "branches, take heed lest he also spare "not thee. Behold the goodness and severity "of God: on them which fell severity; but "towards thee goodness, if thou continue in

" his goodness; otherwise, thou also *shalt be* " *cut off*," &c.

II. The Epistle to the Ephesians is also written in the name of Paul, but under a supposition that a Christian Church was settled at Ephesus, before Paul himself preached the Gospel there; for, c. i. v. 15 and 16, the writer makes him say, " Wherefore I also, " after *I heard of* your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto *all the Saints*, cease not " to give thanks for you," &c. and c. iii. v. 1, &c. " for this cause, I Paul, the *Prisoner* of " Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles, *if ye have* " *heard of* the dispensation of the grace of God " which is given to me to you-ward; how that " by revelation he made known unto me " the mystery (as *I wrote* afore in few words); " whereby *when ye read*, ye may understand " my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." This supposition, however, cannot possibly be allowed by any one who credits the history of the Acts of the Apostles; for in that we are expressly told, c. xviii. and xix. that Paul himself preached the Gospel at Ephesus, first in the synagogue of the Jews, at two different times, and afterwards in the school

of Tyrannus, for the space of two years; and to read over his valedictory discourse to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, at Miletus, recorded Acts xx. is amply sufficient to convince every impartial mind, that Paul could never have written to the Ephesians in the above quoted language of this Epistle. Some critics indeed, without the least proof, suggest that this Epistle was originally inscribed to the Church of Laodicea, and not of Ephesus; but if there was really any satisfactory evidence, that, notwithstanding the great dissimilarity of the names, the transcribers of all the existing copies had conspired to make so extraordinary a change, still the difficulty would not be removed; because, according to the Acts, Paul was the first preacher of the Gospel at Laodicea also, and every other part of Asia Minor

The same insuperable objection lies against the Epistle to the Colossians, which is manifestly fabricated by the same opificer who composed that to the Ephesians. In c. i. v. 4—9, the author makes Paul say, that it was Epaphras who first preached the Gospel to the Colossians; and that it was from him he had *heard of* their faith and love in Christ Jesus. And, c. ii. v. 1, he makes him ex-

pressly declare, that neither they nor the Laodiceans *had seen his face in the flesh.* Yet Colosse and Laodicea were both cities of Phrygia, where Luke assures us,* Paul, accompanied by himself, repeatedly preached the Gospel to every city *in order.*

III. THERE are also some circumstances in the Epistles to the Philippians and to Titus, which render them both apocryphal in my estimation; but as they may not, perhaps, be thought by others to afford the same satisfactory demonstration of their spuriousness, as I persuade myself I have produced in the three preceding cases, I only mention them by the way, and submit them to the mature consideration of those who, as well as myself, may think it of the first importance, to both the teacher and learner of the Gospel, to separate truth from fabulous falsehood, and the genuine scriptures of Christ's primitive disciples from the presumptuous fictions and forgeries of the fathers of the grand apostasy in the second and third centuries.

In the very first verse of the Epistle to the Philippians, there is a distinction made between the general congregation of *the Saints*

* Acts xvi. 6—xviii. 23

or Christians, and the Bishops and Deacons, which is not to be found in any other epistolary address of Paul; and which, if it be not an interpolation, savours very strongly of a much later age than that of the Apostles. At verse 13—18, compared with c. iv. v. 22, we are informed, that through the notice taken of him during his imprisonment, many of the Emperor Nero's court were converted to Christianity, a fact in the highest degree improbable, and far from being confirmed by Luke or any Roman historian; and that many disciples of the Gospel, who, to be many, must have been converted before Paul's arrival at Rome, which Luke's history makes quite incredible, emboldened by his success, preached the Gospel there at the same time that he did, some of them, good Christians! only enviously for contention and strife's sake, in hopes to vex and teaze him; all which seems irreconcilable to the account given us in the last chapter of the Acts. In c. iii. v. 2, the Philippians are bid to *beware of dogs and of the concision*, expressions never used by Paul in any other writing. The latter seems a very improper, unbecoming manner of speaking of a divine ordinance, which, as the Mosaic Covenant was not then actually

abrogated, still subsisted, and was even practised by Paul himself on his disciple Timothy, though he was only the son of a Jewish mother by a Greek father. And if by the former we are to understand the Cynic philosophers, what was there in their numbers, doctrines, or lives, that could make Paul point them out as so peculiarly inimical to Christianity above the other philosophic sects? In chap. iv. v. 3, he intreats his *yoke-fellow*, whom, however, he does not name, to "help those women who labour with him in "the Gospel;" yet Luke assures us, that none but he and Timothy accompanied Paul into Macedonia and Greece: and, 1 Cor. c. ix. v. 5, Paul himself plainly intimates, that though some other Apostles and preachers of the Gospel were accompanied by their wives or female relations, he and Barnabas had no woman who attended them. In the fifth verse the writer says, *the Lord is at hand;* apparently meaning that the predicted *coming of Christ* was nearly approaching; but that is directly contradictory to Paul's own explicit doctrine in the second chapter of his second Epistle to the Thessalonians. In verses 10—19, we find the author describing himself as in a state of *affliction* and pecuniary

distress, and very seasonably relieved by the supply they had sent him by Epaphroditus; reminding them, that at his first preaching the Gospel in Macedonia, they were the only Christian Church who gave him any thing; and that they, two or three times, relieved *his necessity*, when he was at Thessalonica. Yet Luke tells us, that, no accusation being sent to Rome by the Jews against Paul, he was under no *affliction* and very little restraint, being permitted to dwell where he pleased, under the guard of a single soldier; and that he "dwelt two whole years in his "own hired house, and received all that came "in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God "and teaching Christianity boldly, no man "forbidding him." And we know that Paul's constant boast was, that he always* maintained himself by his own labour, and never made his preaching the Gospel a charge to any body; and though, 2 Cor. xi. 9, he says, that the Macedonian converts supplied that pecuniary deficiency, which was occasioned by the persecutions that interrupted his manual labour, far from intimating that the Philippians had been particularly benevolent and liberal towards him, at his first preach-

* 1 Cor. ix. 15 and 18.—See also Acts xx. 33—35.

ing the Gospel to them and to the Thessalonians, he says to the latter, 1 Thess. c. ii. v. 2, 6, 9, "After we had suffered before, and "were shamefully entreated, as ye know, *at* "*Philippi*, we were bold in our God, to speak "unto you the Gospel of God, with much "contention.—Nor of men sought we glory, "neither of you, *nor yet of others*, when we "might have been burdensome, as the Apos-"tles of Christ.—For ye remember, brethren, "our labour and travel: for labouring night "and day, because we would not be charge-"able unto any of you, we preached unto "you the Gospel of God."

In the Epistle to Titus, the very introductory address excites in my mind a strong suspicion, that it was not written by Paul; for he calls himself, what he never does in any other Epistle, *a servant* of God; though, to the Galatians, c. iv. v. 6 and 7, he says, "be-"cause ye are sons, God hath sent forth the "spirit of his son into your hearts, crying Abba "Father, wherefore thou art no more *a servant*, "but a son, &c." He adds also, "an Apostle "of Jesus Christ," (not *by the will of God*, as he usually expresses it, but) "*according to the* "*faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of* "*the truth*;" all which, in Paul's mouth, is

quite a new kind of language. As I proceed, my suspicion is greatly confirmed by finding a most malicious, illiberal, national reflection of a Greek Poet upon the moral character of the Cretans quoted by the author, affirmed by him to be true, and the Poet himself denominated *a Prophet*. The satirical verse here quoted is taken from Epimenides, a Poet of Crete, but that part of it which accuses the Cretans of being liars, is copied literally from a hymn of Callimachus in honour of Jupiter, and he explains the grounds of his accusation to be, that "the Cretans had always boasted, "that they had the sepulchre of Jupiter in "their island, which must be false, because it "was impossible for the supreme of the im-"mortals to have died and been buried any-"where." Who can believe that the Apostle Paul would have sanctioned such a slander, founded upon sudh grounds as these? Besides, the state of the Church in Crete, as described in the seven last verses of the first chapter, and the direction about heretics, c. iii. v. 10, are much more suitable to the state of the Church in later times, predicted by Paul to Timothy,* than at any period during the life of Paul. The author of the

* 1 Tim. iv. 1, and 2 Tim. iv. 3 and 4.

Epistle also, c. iii. v. 3, represents himself and Titus, as having, in the former part of their lives, before their conversion to Christianity, been "foolish, disobedient, deceived, "*serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in* "*malice and envy*, hateful, and hating one "another." Now, when Paul enumerates several unchristian immoralities to the Corinthians,* he adds, not including himself, nor even the majority of the heathen converts, "and such were *some of you;* but ye are "washed," &c. And of himself he confidently declared before the Jewish Council, Acts c. xxiii. v. 1, "Men and brethren, I "have lived in all good conscience before "God, until this day."

As to the Epistle to Philemon, it is too insignificant to merit much attention; but it is observable, that, in this short letter, Paul not only talks of his *bonds*, a phrase not uncommonly applied to any kind of confinement or restraint, but speaks of his *fellow-prisoner*: and yet we learn from the Acts, that he himself was the only Christian prisoner sent thither by Festus; and that he was permitted "to dwell *by himself*, with a soldier that kept "him."

* 1 Cor. vi. 9 and 10.

IV. That the Epistle to the Hebrews could not be written by Paul, is so evident to any reader, who compares the style and scope of it with those of his other Epistles, that it seems astonishing that, even in the fifth century, it should have been decreed to be his, especially since the writer does not pretend to be Paul; and the only circumstance of probability that he was so, is the mention of Timothy, in the close of the Epistle; as if there never was more than one Christian of that name. But that it is of much later date than the Apostolic age, is manifest from chap. xiii. v. 7 and 17, where the teachers of Christianity are said to *rule over* their congregations, in direct contradiction to our Saviour's express injunctions, and to the constant practice of Paul himself and all the primitive preachers of the Gospel. Indeed, I cannot imagine a grosser affront to the memory of the great Apostle to the Gentiles, than to ascribe to *him*, either the interpreting the Greek word for Covenant to signify a will or testament; or the assertion of this writer, c. iv. v. 2, that the Gospel was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness, as well as to us; or all the nonsensical absurdity, in chap. vii. about Melchisedec, as a

man *having neither beginning of days nor end of life;* or, lastly, the reckoning as the *perfection* of the Christian doctrine, c. vi. v. 1 and 2, far superior to the doctrines of *Repentance, Faith, the Resurrection,* and a future *Judgment,* the explanation of the Old Covenant of the Mosaic Law, as a type and shadow of the New Covenant of the Gospel, which, upon the principles laid down by Paul himself, in his Epistle to the Galatians, is just as trifling and useless, as it would be to represent the scholastic discipline, under which we are educated in our childhood, as the type and shadow of our conduct, when arrived at manhood, and a full maturity of reason. It must be considered also, that the writing to the Jewish converts particularly, either in general or in any one country, by the appellation of Hebrews, is to make and keep up a distinction between them and the Gentile converts to Christianity, a behaviour quite unjustifiable in any teacher of the Gospel; because all distinctions tend naturally to destroy that unity and mutual affection necessary in the disciples of Jesus Christ; and, as far as our religion is concerned with the writings of the Old Testament, the Gentile converts were equally interested in them with the

Hebrew disciples; and Paul, especially, could never have made such a distinction; for he assures us, Gal. iii. 27 and 28, that, "as many "as have been baptized into Christ, have put "on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, "there is neither bond nor free, there is nei- "ther male nor female; for ye are all one in "Christ Jesus." The author too has thought fit to change the original words of the fortieth Psalm, in order to make them confirm his new doctrine, that the body of Jesus crucified was a propitiatory sacrifice for sin; and quotes the Psalmist, as saying "sacrifice and offering "thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou pre- "pared me;" whereas David really says, "sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire, "mine ears hast thou opened:" that is, thou hast made me obedient to thy word; expressing the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, in nearly the same sentiment with that of Samuel, "behold, to obey is bet- "ter than sacrifice, and to *hearken* than the "fat of rams." Whether this extraordinary transmutation of the sense of the royal Psalmist, was made by the error of the translators of the Septuagint, or whether the Septuagint itself was thus altered by the *ready-fingered* interpolaters of much later times, to accom-

modate it to the doctrine taught in this Epistle, I know not;* but this I know, that no Hebrew, writing particularly to the Hebrews, could have quoted the scriptures of the Old Testament, in the words of the Greek translation, instead of those of the original Hebrew; especially where the sense of the two differed very materially; and, therefore, I am fully satisfied, that neither Paul, nor any other Jew, was the author of this Epistle. In c. ii. v. 13, the author has had the effrontery, to quote the words of Isaiah, c. viii. v. 18, as meaning Jesus Christ and his disciples, though, whoever turns to the book of the Jewish prophet must see, that he is speaking only of himself and his own children, as appointed by God to be signs to Ahaz and the inhabitants of Jerusalem at that time. In c. iii. v. 1, this writer calls Christ Jesus, *the Apostle of our profession*, that is, I suppose, *of the Christian faith*; but the denomination, *Apostle*, in all the genuine scriptures, is pe-

* Doctor Whitby supposes, that this accommodation was made by the suggestions of the Holy Spirit to the minds of the seventy translators; but it is more consonant to reason to believe, that the Holy Spirit supplied the Royal Prophet, in the first instance, with words duly expressive of the meaning of the Deity: and, therefore, they, who are acquainted with the practices of the ραδιουργοι of the second and third centuries of the Christian æra, will think it much more probable, that the accommodating alteration was their ingenious work.

culiarly appropriated to those who were delegated by him to preach the Gospel; and, as Paul's constant boast is, that he was *an Apostle of Jesus Christ*, it seems impossible, that *he* should have given the same denomination to Jesus Christ himself. Let us consider also, to whom this Epistle could have been sent by Paul. It is said to be written from Italy to the Hebrews, that is, the Jews; but there were Jews in every city where he had preached the Gospel, and he had first taught in their synagogues; and when the majority of them had every where rejected the Gospel, he had determined to turn from them to the Gentiles, whose conversion was the peculiar object of his apostleship, as that of the Jews was of Peter's; the Jews, therefore, in every Gentile city, made too small a part of the Christian Church, to be particularly written to by Paul; and, since there were some in every city, to which of them was this letter sent? for it could not be delivered to them all. If, by the word *Hebrews*, is meant the Hebrew nation of Palestine, and we are to understand, that this Epistle was sent to the Jews of the Christian Church at Jerusalem; it is by no means credible, that Paul should so far de-

part from his own peculiar province, and invade that of Peter, as to send such a letter as this to that Church, of which Peter himself, and all the other surviving Apostles, were resident members. Besides, in c. ii. v. 3 and 4, the author expresses himself in terms, which plainly shew, he was not Paul, and that he lived after the Apostolic age; for he says, the Gospel "at the first began to be spoken "by the Lord, and was confirmed unto *us* by "them that heard him; God also bearing "*them* witness, both with signs and wonders, "and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy "Ghost." The writer is here evidently speaking of persons, circumstances, and times already past; and distinguishes himself and his contemporaries from the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, who confirmed their doctrine by the testimony of miracles. He cannot therefore be Paul, who repeatedly assures us, that he received his instruction in the Gospel from no man living, but by immediate revelation from Jesus Christ; and who was himself endued with the power of working miracles, and enjoyed the gifts of the holy inspiration in the highest degree.

The same objections which have been urged against the Epistle addressed particularly to

the Hebrews, lie in full force against the Epistle of James also; for though it is professedly written to Christians, who, as such, were no longer Jews, it is addressed "to the "twelve tribes which are *scattered abroad*;" an expression which seems to refer to the final dispersion of the Jews under Vespasian, and consequently to imply that it was not penned till after that event: yet such a denomination, even if we should suppose, that some out of all the twelve tribes of the Jews had been converted to Christianity during the ministry of the Apostles, could no longer be given to them with the least propriety, for reasons which I have already mentioned. And to what place could a letter so addressed have been sent? Indeed, from the whole tenor of the Epistle it is evident, that it was not written in the age of the Apostles, but in after times, when professed Christians were guilty of many immoralities plainly repugnant to the precepts of their religion; and one cannot suppose that the converts from Judaism alone merited the writer's admonitions and reproofs, nor see why they should be so particularly directed to them. In c. v. v. 8, the writer tells them, that "the coming

"of the Lord draweth nigh," which he confirms in the next verse, by adding, "behold "the judge standeth before the door;" whereby he plainly shews that he was no Apostle of Christ, nor well instructed in the Gospel prophecies respecting our Lord's coming again: for Paul wrote expressly to the Thessalonians to correct their misapprehension upon that very point, and to assure them, that before that predicted period would arrive, true Christianity would be shamefully corrupted, and a lamentable, sinful apostasy from the faith of the Gospel would be established in the world; which John told them would continue to prevail for near thirteen centuries. At the tenth verse, he tells them, to "take the prophets who have spoken in "the name of the Lord," (without doubt meaning the Apostles) "for an example of "suffering affliction and patience;" which proves that he was not himself an Apostle. The origin also of extreme unction, for which a direction is given, v. 14, is a demonstration that the writer himself was not endowed with the gift of healing; and that he wrote after those miraculous powers had ceased in the Church. The shocking doctrine also, v. 15,

that a wicked Christian, upon the bed of sickness, may receive forgiveness of his sins by means of the prayers of the Elders of the Church; and the institution of *auricular confession*, v. 16, afford much more convincing proofs that this Epistle is one of the many spurious writings of the third century, than it is possible to produce in favour of its authenticity.

V. The Epistle called the first of Peter, is supposed also to have been addressed to the Jewish converts to Christianity, that were dispersed throughout the several countries of Asia Minor; and, if so, it is liable to the objections already urged against the two last-mentioned Epistles. But, in c. ii. v. 10, speaking of those to whom the Epistle is directed, the author says, "which, in time past, "were not a people, but are now the people "of God;" words which, in the prophecy of Hosea, from whence they are quoted, are spoken particularly of the conversion of the Gentiles, and could never, with any propriety, be applied to the Jews. However, whether it be supposed to be written to the Jewish or the Gentile converts, since the countries men-

tioned are precisely those where it was peculiarly allotted to Paul to preach the Gospel, whilst the province of Judea and Palestine was as peculiarly allotted to Peter, it cannot be believed, without much better evidence than is produced in favour of this Epistle, that Peter wrote it; especially when we find the author professing himself, c. iv. v. 3, to have been, in the former part of his life, *a lascivious, lustful, drunken, riotous, and abominably idolatrous Gentile.* Peter also could not have been so ignorant of the sense of the Christian prophecies as to affirm, as this writer does, c. iv. v. 7, that when he wrote, *the end of all things was at hand.* The author professes too to write from Babylon, where, whether we understand Assyrian or Egyptian Babylon, there is not the least reason to believe Peter ever went. Could any Apostle of Jesus Christ write such nonsense as we find, c. iii. v. 19 and 20, about Christ's going by the spirit, and preaching *to the spirits in prison,* who were disobedient at the time of Noah's flood? And what is said, c. ii. v. 12, of the Christians being accused as *evil-doers,* which, we know from Pliny's testimony, was not the case in the beginning of the

second century, is another proof that this Epistle also, was not the work of any man of the Apostolic age, but of the third century.

Of the second Epistle of Peter, and the Epistle of Jude, which were both evidently written with the same view, viz. to condemn those who opposed the ambitious growth of Clerical power and authority, that advanced apace and to a very unchristian height, in the third century and beginning of the fourth, and both, as seems probable from the style and similarity of expressions, by the same author, it is sufficient to remark, that they have no one testimony of their authenticity, of the least weight, either internal or external; and that they were generally rejected as spurious, from the time of their first appearance till the fifth century: that the author of the second epistle of Peter, c. iii. v. 15 and 16, speaks of Paul's Epistles as being collected together, and universally known in his time; professes to have read them *all;* and says, there are some things in them *hard to be understood;* not one of which circumstances can be reasonably supposed of Peter: that both these Epistles refer to the fabulous legend of *the fallen angels*, and the story of Balaam's ass; and to some apocryphal fiction of a con-

test between Michael and the Devil about the body of Moses; for the truth of all which, whether any other person be able to find faith, I cannot tell; but I am sure such a belief is utterly out of my power.

VI. The three remaining canonical Epistles are attributed to the Apostle John, the author of the Apocalypse, although the style is very different. Of these, the two last are too insignificant to merit much attention; it is, therefore, sufficient to observe concerning them, that all the writers of the fourth century, who are the first that mention them, inform us they were spoken against, and by many rejected as spurious. As to the first and most important of the three, it is evidently the work of the same hand as the Gospel attributed to the same Apostle; for, like a staunch disciple of the Platonic School, he speaks of our Saviour in his introduction, as he had done before in the introduction to his Evangelical History, as the Divine Logos of Plato, manifested to the world in human form. But he very satisfactorily discovers that he was not John; and that he did not write this Epistle till a considerable time after the Apostolic age; for, c. ii. v. 18, he says, "Little

"Children, *it is the last time*: and as ye have "heard that *Antichrist* shall come, even now "are there many *Antichrists*, whereby we "know that *it is the last time*." In this extraordinary assertion are several circumstances deserving particular attention. First, the term Antichrist, which is no where to be found in any other scripture, is here, and again, c. iv. v. 3, mentioned by this writer as a denomination well known by the Christians of his time to express the fatal object of the chief prophecies of the Gospel, which they *had heard should come*. Now, since no such word as this is to be met with, either in the prophecies of the Apocalypse or in Paul's predictions of the same event, it is plain that the term Antichrist could not become commonly used and understood by Christians in general, till, being accustomed to reflect, and talk, and write about the Revelation of John, and more especially about Paul's prophecy contained in 2 Thessalonians, chap. ii. they had agreed to call by that peculiar name the sinful human power, or *that man of sin*, as Paul expresses it, who should oppose his authority to that of God and Christ, and continue in some degree till our Lord's glorious *coming*; but it is not possible, that this should

have been the case with Christians in general, till those books had been in common use, and been often read and commented upon; which it is in the highest degree improbable should happen till long after the death of both Paul and John. Secondly, the writer deems all the heterodox teachers of his own time to be Antichrists, in the sense of these prophecies; though it is manifest from the prophecies themselves, that the opposition to God and Christ, which they describe, is of a very different kind. Thirdly, he declares that the predicted opposer of Christ was then *already in the world*, though Paul expressly affirms, that he would not appear till after there had been a general apostasy of professed Christians from the true and rational faith of the Gospel; an event which did not take place for above a century after the death of all the Apostles, and which, indeed, Paul tells Timothy, 1 Ep. c. iv. v. 1, would happen at some distant period, saying, it would come to pass *in the latter times*, or, as it should rather have been translated, *in* succeeding or *future times* Lastly, the author of this Epistle affirms the time in which he wrote to be *the last time*, and says, that by the Antichrists which then existed, he knew it to be the last time; an assertion

which we, who live 1700 years after the death of John, and 1500 years after the appearance of this Epistle, know to be an absolute falsehood, because *the last time* is not yet come. We know also, that the prophetic author of the Apocalypse could never have uttered such an assertion, because he himself, as well as Paul, hath assured us, that *the last time* of Christianiy is the time when the spirit and power of Antichrist will be annihilated, and the pure uncorrupted religion of the Gospel prevail amongst mankind, which he repeatedly assures us, will not be accomplished till full 1260 years after the complete establishment of a fabulous, blasphemous superstition in every country of Europe, by means of that predicted anti-christian power, which did not begin to shew itself any where before the fourth century of the Christian æra.

I have thus, as concisely as I could, (for to their attainment of truth in such inquiries as these, it is much more necessary to make people think than to make them read,) stated the grounds and reasons of my own rejection of so large a number of those Epistles, which the *orthodox* and *holy Catholic Church* hath thought

fit to adopt as genuine, authentic scriptures of the Apostles of Jesus Christ; and of the strength or weakness of my arguments every reader must determine for himself. I have only further to remark, that not one of these Epistles contains in it that necessary internal testimony of the divine authority of the writer, the spirit of prophecy; whilst Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, Galatians, and Timothy, have the historic testimony in their favour, strongly corroborated by that and every other internal evidence of authenticity.

VII. It remains for me to explain my reasons for objecting also to the Epistles to the seven Churches of Asia, as a spurious interpolation of the important book of the Apocalypse.

In the introduction to those prophetic visions, John calls them "the Revelation which "God gave unto Jesus Christ, to shew unto "his servants things, which must shortly come "to pass, and which he *sent* and signified *by* "*his angel* unto his servant John." Agreeably to this annunciation of the contents of the book, we find, after the beginning of the

visions in the fourth chapter, that an angel is the constant mystagogue of the Apostle through every scene; but the interposition of these seven unimportant, and to us scarcely intelligible, Epistles, occasions a most unaccountable inconsistency in the writer, as it makes him, immediately after the above declaration, introduce a vision, in which, not an *angel sent* by Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ himself, is represented as the sole personage of the vision, appearing under a very extraordinary figure, attended with very extraordinary emblems, for no other purpose, that I can discover, than to condemn the heresy of the Nicolaitanes, and those who scrupled not to eat things offered to idols. Now John's original book of the Apocalypse must have been written before Paul wrote his abovementioned genuine Epistles, because in them he several times refers to it; and from them, and that part of his history which is subsequent to his writing some of them, we learn both that he himself spoke of eating things, which had been offered to idols as innocent in itself, and also that he knew nothing of these disciples of Nicolaus, though these seven churches were all of his own planting; and

though these *visionary* Epistles represent the heresy as subsisting at the time when they were written. The only prophetic part of them also, if any part can properly be called so, is absolutely false; for whilst some are threatened with having their candlestick, that is their church, removed out of its place, and others with other signal punishments and marks of his resentment, the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia are favoured and approved; and the latter is particularly assured, that, "because she "had kept *the word of his patience*, he would "also keep her from the hour of temptation, "which should come upon all the world to "try them that dwell upon the earth." Yet the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia have been both involved in the same common sufferings and calamities with all the other churches of Asia; and have had their candlesticks removed out of their places, and supplanted by the lamps of Mahomed. Besides, in order to predict the leading circumstances of the subsequent prophetic vision, our Saviour must have known, that the church of Philadelphia and of Smyrna, and all the other churches in Asia, would unite, under the de-

nomination of the Greek church, to form the predicted apostasy from his religion; and, by means of an Hierarchy established by the Emperor Constantine, become, at no very distant period, the first grand object of the chief prediction of this very Apocalypse: he therefore could never have dictated Epistles to those churches in such terms as these.

CONCLUSION.

SUCH, candid Reader, are the arguments which have long ago induced the Author of these pages, to regard so large a part of the canonical scriptures as spurious fictions, of no authority, and undeserving the attention of a disciple of Jesus Christ. What effect they may have upon the minds of his readers in general, is not in his power to determine. But it is great satisfaction to him, that, besides the demand of the Public for a new edition, he has received from many individuals, in different and distant parts of the kingdom, the most unequivocal testimony of their approbation. And whosoever will attentively examine those writings, which, thus convinced, he refuses to admit into his Creed, will find, that they alone have given cause for that voluminous inundation of school-divinity, and those endless theological controversies, that have for so many ages oppressed the literature

and fatigued the patience of Europe; that they alone have been the source of those wild, irrational systems, which have so long misled people from the plain, straight, perspicuous paths of true religion, into the manifold, devious wanderings of that obscure labyrinth of fabulous superstition, whose impious doctrines, having nothing to do with reason, and applying only to the passions, have so exasperated the minds of men against each other, and so inhumanly, as well as unchristianly, hardened their hearts, as to produce frequently, in every nation of Christendom, under the plea of godly zeal, scenes of the most barbarous violence and brutal cruelty. Doctrines, which (since statesmen have been wise enough to discourage the spirit of religious persecution,) have filled the nominally Christian world with a continually increasing variety of sects, both the teachers and disciples of which, according to the prophetic description long since given of them by the Apostle Paul, though from infancy to old age they are *ever learning*, are *never able* to attain a rational, satisfactory intelligence of the religion they continue to profess, nor *to come to the knowledge* of the obvious and simple, but important, *truths* of the New

Covenant of the Gospel. Doctrines which, well knowing them to have had their origin only in the second and third centuries, and finding them to be pointed out by the finger of God himself, as the falsehoods and fabulous fictions of the predicted Antichristian Apostasy, which, when supported by the power of the civil magistrate, would for so many centuries supplant the genuine Religion of the New Covenant, preached by Christ and his Apostles, the Author glories in having strenuously combated, for near thirty years, by arguments which have never yet been refuted. And now, having attained the advanced age of his seventy-fifth year, amidst the increasing bodily infirmities and debility, which he reasonably considers as admonitions of his approaching dissolution, he blesses God for his gracious goodness, in having continued to him the entire preservation of his mental faculties, which has enabled him to give the Public a Second Edition of this Work; in which he hopes they will find many arguments considerably improved and strengthened. And now, being conscious of having faithfully discharged his duty to God, his Saviour, and to his fellow-creatures, to

the best of the abilities that God has given him, he chearfully resigns himself to his mortal fate, in a firm confidence of inheriting in another life the blessed rewards of that Covenant, in the cause of which he has so long contended almost alone.

Walker, Printer.

ERRATA.

Page 19—Line 14—*For* he, *read* the.
104—*Note*—Line 7—*Read* tells us.
160—Line 21—*For* Asphalites, *read* Asphaltites.
161—*Note*—Line 5—*For* repentanc, *read* repentance.
162—Line 27—*For* Pharisess, *read* Pharisees.
176—Line 4—*Dele* up.
299—Line 3—*Dele* from.

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